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November 13, 1894.

No. 903.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXV.



"NOW, GO! ET'S FER LIFE OR DEATH!" AND THE DODGER STRUCK OUT BOLDLY, ON THE LEAD.

Halliday

Billy Blue Blazes,

THE DODGER OF THE DOCKS ;

OR,

THE DOUBLE DETECTIVE.

BY BEN D. HALLIDAY,
AUTHOR OF "BASEMENT BERT," "GOOD-FOR-
NOTHING JERRY," "CITIZEN RUBE,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIERY ORDEAL.

THE North River was shrouded in darkness, and the piers were silent after the rush of the day. The long line of lights, which looked pale and feeble, marked the water front, and seemed to twinkle and wink in a friendly way to the big ferry-boats that were ranging between the New York and Jersey shores in their peculiarly grim way.

On West street a young man stood and looked thoughtfully toward the west, where the grand old river lay with its agreeable and impressive picture.

"All quiet to-night!" he murmured. "Reckon there is no fun ahead."

This person who sighed for "fun" was not the most handsome-looking citizen of New York. He seemed to have a very short, unshapely figure, though much of this appearance might have been due to the clothes he wore. They had no particular style, and made him have no shape except breadth, with rough outlines where there should have been none.

On his head was a very battered soft hat, and around this, and through holes in the top thereof, his black hair stuck out in wild disorder. His face was dark from sunburn, or some other cause, yet was so profusely freckled as to seem to have a novel species of tattooing upon it.

He did not look vicious, but, when one noticed the merry twinkle in his eyes, appeared like one who had said good-by to system, and gloried in being the gamia galore.

His age apparently was not much less than eighteen years.

He was about to move on when his manner suddenly grew more alert.

"Smoke!" he exclaimed, "and where there's smoke like that there's dead sure fire."

He looked around critically, but all the buildings within sight seemed to be in their normal condition. No gleam of light or rising wreath of smoke told that fire was at work.

"May be only a natural blaze," he added, "but I ain't so sure of that. I'll watch. Nobody wants to be burned out, to-night, and I'll reconnoiter a bit. Maybe Billy Blue Blazes can turn fireman, as well as Dodger of the Docks. I'll see!"

In order to have a better view of the structures that lined the east side of the street he set out to cross the thoroughfare, but, as he did so, his suspicions were abruptly and startlingly confirmed.

From one of the docks a sheet of flame leaped up like a maddened creature seeking its prey, and the bright light vividly revealed the form of a vessel.

Then came a roar which indicated that the fire already was well under way, although it had just burst forth.

"Hi! here's the dickens to pay!" cried the Dock Dodger. "Not a stir on the craft! Is everybody away, or are they still asleep, below?"

He ran out on the pier, and saw at a glance how thoroughly the fire-fiend had clinched his hold. Starting below, the flames had been confined in the hold until their own fury had burst a way through the deck or hatches, and liberated the hot pillar that was now playing on the darkness in yellow and red.

"A big three-master, and gone to glory!" was Billy's expressive comment. "Where are the snoozers who run her?"

While he was considering this point a faint cry arose from the water, and he bent forward eagerly. The light now leaped so high that the water was tinged red with its glare, and it was no long task to get explanation of the cry.

Billy Blue Blazes saw a struggle for life going on.

He saw three persons, one of whom was a negro, and upon whom devolved great responsibility. A woman and a child were in his care, and he was struggling desperately to save them,

but against great odds. Neither was as quiet as the emergency demanded, and the strong tide added to his great task.

His big, white eyes rolled upward with an almost despairing gaze, but his face lighted up at sight of Billy.

"Help!" he called. "Help us, or we'll all be drowned!"

The appeal was unnecessary. Already the Dodger of the Docks was casting off his coat. He heard some one on West street sounding the alarm-cry of "Fire!" in a loud voice, but that was not help at that critical moment.

Free from his coat and shoes, he dropped off of the pier and was soon beside the imperiled trio.

"Take de boy!" requested the negro, pantingly.

Billy swung his arms around the child, who was about eight years old.

"Brace up, old chap!" the rescuer directed, addressing the colored man. "Jest keep afloat awhile longer, and folks will be on the pier who'll pull us out like so many shad. Ketch on!"

"Can't do it!" protested the negro. "My strength am all gone, an' I'll be gone myself, suah, ef we doan' land pretty soon. Pick de best chaine, an' let it be done quick, boss."

"Can you swim ter the other pier?"

"I guesses I can."

"Do it, then. Thar's better chance fer landin' there, an' it's gettin' hotter than a perlitikel debate here. Strike out, Sambo, an' we'll soon be beside Jonah, on dry land. Get a wiggle on, quick!"

The plan was well conceived, but Billy had failed to take one thing into consideration. As they turned the point of the pier they were caught by a current so swift that the already-weary negro was unable to resist its force. It grasped him; it bore him down-stream like a feather.

Billy was not in trim to check this movement. His own burden was solid, but not so heavy but the rescuer could have managed it all right if the small boy had kept quiet.

This he did not do, but, in his alarm, kicked and struggled in a most discouraging way.

Finally, Billy saw there was bound to be a tragedy unless he averted it promptly. Swinging one of his arms around the small boy, he pinioned the latter's arms firmly, and then made a spurt and got directly in the negro's path.

By the force of his own weight and exertions he checked the man's progress and hurriedly directed:

"Now fer the pier! Make a bold push for it, Mister Dark! Ef you get a wiggle on you'll git there; ef you don't, Davy Jones will close his locker on ye. Now, go! Et's fer life or death!" and the Dodger struck out boldly, on the lead.

The warning was not in vain; the colored man put forth all his strength, and Billy was of such great help to him that they gradually neared the pier.

There, chance favored them. A small boat, evidently belonging to a vessel lying at the pier, was in the right place, and after a little all were safely landed out of the wet.

The negro simply lay still and gasped. He had nearly died of suffocation before getting out of the vessel, and was not fit for the gallant fight he had made, later. The rescued woman clasped the boy in her arms and began to murmur words to which Billy gave no attention.

He stood up and gazed upon the burning schooner.

It was now a vast sheet of flame which roared and mounted high in the air, reddening the piers, buildings and water around it. Engines were clattering up, and the police were gathering in on the run.

As for the vessel, beside which they now were, no one was to be seen on board, and the Dodger correctly judged that whoever had been there a few minutes before had gone to the other pier to help at the fire.

"Right smart blaze!" Billy commented, speaking in a peculiar voice he had not used when alone on West street, but had assumed promptly when with others.

"Four, eleven, forty-four!" murmured the negro.

"Hey? W'ot's that?"

"I's tryin' ter bring back my strength."

"Oh! be you? An' will the policy numbers do it?"

"They're a mascot to a colored gent, but a hoodoo ter white folks."

"All right; glad you spoke of it. I'll never use 'four, eleven, forty-four' ter git my muscle up. Nary time! D'ye get a Samson wiggle on, mister?"

"I feel a good bit stronger. Four, eleven, forty-four!"

"Bully fer you, Dark!"

"My name is G. Washington Calhoun, commonly called Wash."

"All right, Wash; I suspected you was a person of quality. Now, le's git up on the pier. I see a ladder above, an' I'll simply tumble up, let 'er down, hustle you all ter higher regions, an' then we'll kinder spread ourselves an' warble 'Marchin' Through Georgia.' See?"

George Washington was not sure he did see, fully, but the leading idea commended itself to his judgment, and, when he approved of it, it was carried out. All ascended in safety to the pier.

By that time several engines were playing on the fire.

"That schooner is a gone goose!" Billy declared.

"Yes, sah, suah!"

"Hope nobody wa'n't burned up?"

"Nobody wa'n't; we-uns was the only pusses aboard."

"Wal, this ain't a very healthy place fer folks that is drenched an' drippin', fer the breeze from Communipaw is cuttin' the clover down all over my hide; so le's git a move on an' go ter yer friends. I reckon the cap'n o' the schooner will take keer o' you, an' I'll hunt him up fer you."

The rescued woman had been sitting with the boy in her arms, caressing his damp curls, but she suddenly aroused to life.

"No, no!" she exclaimed.

"No!" Billy echoed.

"Don't do it, don't! Don't let him see us, or know of us. Let him think we are dead. Have pity on us, and don't betray us to him. Don't, don't!"

This appeal was made with vehemence, and wildly, and she clasped her hands nervously. Billy was astonished, but equal to the emergency.

"Nothin' sha'n't be done to worry you, mum. But, be you sure you're on the right track? Ef you b'long on the schooner you must hev some friend there."

"I have none, none!"

"But the captain—"

"My bitterest foe! Let him think me dead!"

"Mebbe he was burnt up?"

"He! Rest assured he was not, but that is the fate he worked out for us. He set fire to the schooner in order to burn me and my child alive!"

Again she clasped the boy in her arms, while Billy gazed at her in amazement. Such an atrocity as this was enough to chill any honest person's blood. Then a doubt came to him. Was there ground for the belief, or was she in a deranged condition on account of her late peril?

"He prob'ly has misused you in the past," he suggested.

"No."

"Then ain't you an artom hasty ter accuse him now?"

"Et's all true, sah," declared Wash Calhoun. "When I woke up de wessel was all on flah, an' de smoke an' flames playin' tag 'round de hold ob de wessel. I roused up Mrs. Rawlins an' Leslie quick, an' told dem it was all right; we could jest walk out dat easy. But de walkin' didn't prove so scrumptious ez I's thinkin', sah; when we-uns got to de companionway we found we's shut in. Yes, sah; de wessel had been sot afire, an' den closed up like a coffin, air-tight; an' dere we was wid de way of escape cut off. Golly, but didn't I work! They had took away all things I's likely ter use dat they knowed of, but I knew of an ax they didn't find; an' de way I went fer dat door an' slide was a caution ter South Cah'liny flies in molasses time! I bu'sted down de whole business; but I's done tellin' you dat only fer dat ax, overlooked by dem rascals, we'd all been burnt up alive, on purpose!"

"Harlem fleas! You don't say so!"

"It is true," Mrs. Rawlins corroborated.

"But the captain—"

"He is the guilty one!—my wicked brother!"

"The cap'n yer brother, an' tried ter burn ye up in the schooner! Mightytation!"

Experienced as Billy was in city life, he stood appalled at the idea of such an atrocious crime.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE SCHOONER.

THE rescued woman shivered and looked around nervously.

"Don't speak so loud," she requested. "Somebody might overhear you."

"Wal, b'gosh! ef things are as you say, I

should s'pose you'd want 'em ter hear!" declared Billy Blue Blazes. "Why, I'd hev the cap'n yanked inter perleece hock, first off. Ain't you goin' ter accuse him?"

"No."

"Harlem fleas! you don't say so!"

"I want a promise from you," continued Mrs. Rawlins, quickly. "I judge by the fierceness of the fire that the fine vessel will be burned to the water's edge. It will be hard to tell whether any one lost life there. Captain Beebe will suppose us burned to death, which is just what I wish him to think. Promise me to keep the fact of my escape a secret. It is really very important."

She spoke earnestly, excitedly.

"Why?" asked Billy, as if in perplexity what to say or do.

"I want him to think his terrible plot has succeeded. I shall not be safe unless he believes me dead. No one but us knows of our escape. Let it be so; let me go to a refuge, and be the same as dead to Simon Beebe."

"Them is my sentiments," Wash Calhoun declared. "I'd rather be dead by make-believe than dead in earnest. See, you-uns? Good scheme. We'll jest vanishment from de cap'n's optikel vision an' hide in a secretion place. Dis niggah ain't no jabberin' ijjit, you bet!"

Billy was silent. There were certain weighty reasons why he was reluctant to let matters rest after such a crime had been committed, and his companions were asking more of him than they knew. But when Mrs. Rawlins continued the argument, he gave way.

"All right, mum; et shall be jest as you say. This is your funeral—I mean, it's your jubilee, an' w'at you say goes. But you'll ketch pneumonia an' catarrh ef you stay here in the Jersey breezes. Whar be you goin'?"

"Where, indeed?" she sighed.

"S'pose I might git you a place down on West Twenty-seventh street, ef you don't mind colored gents a-playin' policy," observed Wash, doubtfully.

"Ain't you any pussional friends, mum?" Billy asked.

"No; none that I dare appeal to now."

"Wal, I'll find kiver fer you, fer a few hours, anyhow. You want ter slide out o' them wet clothes quicker'n a rat kin squeal. Come with me."

The invitation was very agreeable, and the trio followed where Billy led. Their course took them somewhat nearer to the fire. But the guide kept well away from the crowd, and, after going a few blocks, brought up at a humble building, the basement of which was used as a coal-shop. At the entrance was this unique sign:

"OLD KING COAL,

"A MERRY OLD SOUL,

"SELLS FUEL, FAGOTS AND FIREWOOD.

"For Cash.

"COAL!"

The coal emporium was now closed, but Billy pulled the bell of the front door, and a woman made her appearance. This was Mrs. John Jones, wife of the eccentric merchant who termed himself Old King Coal.

Mrs. Jones was a woman of few words, but when she was informed that the callers wished to see her husband, Billy, being an old acquaintance, was directed to lead the way up. All this was a form. Billy had a key to the house, and always came and went when he pleased, but, now, it did not please him to take in outsiders too freely.

John Jones, otherwise Old King Coal, was in his room, a little, weather-beaten old man, whose most noticeable peculiarity was a pair of eyebrows of tremendous size.

"Old Coal," remarked Billy, "I have brought you company."

"Mermaids, right out o' the sea?" demanded Mr. Jones, looking at the dripping quartette.

"Folks jest barely saved from drownin'?"

"By Andrew Jackson! you don't say so!"

"Yes; and the question is, Can you give them shelter fer awhile?"

"Kin I? W'ot do I live fer! W'ot do I sell coals fer? W'ot is this housen made fer? Folks, I'm glad ter see yer! Toddle terseats. Fall inter chairs! Tumble onto the floor! Hang yerselves up on nails! Do anything ter be comfortable. Them is the sentiments of Old King Coal, an' he's a jolly old soul. But, bless my best diamonds! you'll git the roomatiz an' chicken-pox in them wet clothes. Wife, wife, hustle an' git dry garments. Bring male garments fer the males, an' female garments fer the females; an'

don't git the two mixed up, or we'll never be able ter tell one from the other. Hump yerselves, folks, an' git inter dry raiment!"

Old King Coal had a high-pitched, cracked voice, and likewise a kind heart. He took an interest in these persons without even knowing their cause or their names, even as his benevolent heart and jolly disposition led him to take an interest in all needy persons.

Billy's thoughts were more practical, and while Mrs. Jones made preparations to get the newcomers more comfortably clad, he came down to business and obtained Old King Coal's permission to let them all remain over night.

Then he left the house.

"Great boy, that!" the old fellow commented. "Billy Blue Blazes is his name—a name out o' the common, but jest as good as mine. The Dodger of the Docks, they call him, fer he makes it a pint ter be around the docks an' see w'ot is goin' on—what for, this here rescue shows."

In the mean while Billy was making his way back to the scene of the fire.

When he arrived he found that the schooner had been liberally drenched from both street and river, and the fire was under control, but the headway it had gained in the hold, before it burst forth and before help came had settled the fate of the fine craft. It now was a mere wreck, and never would float on the water again in trade.

He mixed with the crowd and listened to hear what was said. No one was present who knew much about the doomed vessel, and there was no one to answer the question, Had any lives been lost? Billy was curious to see the captain of the craft, and he waited a long while, but Beebe did not come, nor did any one who had especial interest in the matter.

Giving it up at last, the Dodger went back to Old King Coal's house. Using his key, he admitted himself, and went to a room which he regularly hired, and proceeded to make a change in his appearance.

It was a great and radical change!

When he had put his old, coarse clothes aside he washed his face, using not only water, but some liquid from a bottle, and the sunburn and freckles disappeared as if by magic. Then he combed his long hair, and the locks which had before stood out so wildly and erratically were put in place as neatly as those of a Broadway clerk.

Next, he donned a suit of clothes which were neat, somewhat expensive, and fashionable, and the work was done.

Truly, it was a great change.

In place of the Billy Blue Blazes of the docks was a neat, well-dressed, stylish-looking youth of eighteen who did not in the least resemble Billy. In every way he was like the Broadway clerk before referred to.

Even in weight there appeared to be a vast change. In the clothes of Billy Blue Blazes he was broad and heavy-looking, simply because those clothes were ill-fitting and too large for him. Now he was slender in build, and seemed never to have known poverty or hard work.

He had another talk with King Coal, and then left the house. He took the Elevated Road, went up-town as far as West Thirteenth street, and there passed the night.

In the morning he breakfasted with stylish-looking people at a late hour, and then went down-town and sought a business office. It was that leased by one Azro Harker, who was a detective connected with the Pinkerton Agency.

Billy entered. Mr. Harker nodded to him, and he answered in the same way. Mr. Harker had a visitor, and this man paused and looked at the new-comer.

"An assistant of mine, named Will Archer," Harker explained. "Go on, captain!"

"The long and short of it is," explained the captain, "I want the guilty person hunted down and punished, if the fire really was set. Seems to me it must have been accidental, but the firemen have other ideas. It don't do to dally in such cases, and I am ready to pay you well for looking into it. It is an awful calamity, at the least. You don't know how I am stabbed to the heart, sir! My sister and her child were my only relatives, and now they are gone. And by such an awful fate! Pardon me if I seem weak, sir, but I am pierced to the heart!"

Tears had been rolling down the speaker's face, and he now broke out in sobs and wept like a child.

"I know, I know, Captain Beebe!" murmured Harker, in gloomy pity.

Billy had sat down at a desk and was busy with some letters which his employer had opened and left for future use, but he had not failed to

hear all that was said. He now ceased work and gazed at Captain Beebe.

If the latter's name had not been a sufficient guide, his words would have settled the one important fact—this man was the captain of the lost schooner, and brother of Mrs. Rawlins!

But, when the captain wept, a unique feature was introduced to the case.

The weeping was unique, also. It was the first time Billy had seen anything of the kind, but he might have looked long without finding any one who could eclipse Captain Beebe in that line.

The sailor had tremendous chest-capacity, and his sobs were like turbulent thunder on a small scale, as it were. There seemed to be danger that he would draw his big boots up through his lungs when that natural bellows got a little more under way.

He was a man of fifty years, with two hundred pounds of flesh, bone and muscle. He was a typical sailor in certain ways, though Billy rarely had seen one so rough of exterior. Shaggy as a sheep was this rover of the deep, and brush and comb evidently knew him but seldom.

Yet his appearance was not brutal, and as Billy saw him weep so profusely and heard those deep sobs, he could but ask himself if Mrs. Rawlins really was right in her estimate.

Had this free weeper tried to kill his own sister by means of a plot as foul as any in all New York's list of hideous crimes? And had he done wisely in promising not to tell of her rescue?

While he was thus meditating Captain Beebe began to recover his composure.

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERY ON THE PIER.

BRUSHING away his tears and blowing his nose like a trumpet, the captain sadly remarked:

"I am a heart-broken man, and shall sail the sea no more. I think I shall go into hermitage, and never mix with men again. But before I do it, sir, I want to know how the Smiling Sarah got on fire. If the blaze was set, sir, I will devote my whole life to hunting down the guilty wretches!"

"Your case shall receive my immediate attention, Captain Beebe," said Azro. "There are few detectives that I stand aside for, if I do say it, and I shall get at the bottom of the mystery, I presume."

"Do it, sir, and I will gladly pay you the sum you mention. "Oh, my poor sister!"

Simon groaned aloud, and a few more tears coursed down his cheeks, but he did not remain. Urging the detective to use all possible diligence he departed, and they heard him groan again in the hall.

"A grievous case, Will," remarked Mr. Harker. "He was captain of the schooner Smiling Sarah, which was burned in a North River dock last night, and his sister and her child and a colored man were burned with it. There are vague suspicions of incendiarism—possibly unfounded—and I am to investigate for him."

"He appears to be a very demonstrative man," young Archer suggested.

"No doubt he loved his sister deeply."

"Very likely, sir."

"I may want you on the case. By the way, what do you do with yourself when not working for me?"

"Oh! I drift around generally, sir. As I may become a genuine detective, some time, it behooves me to know every nook and corner of New York that I can."

"That's right, Will. Now, let us get at the letters."

Azro Harker regarded himself as an expert detective, but for penmanship, spelling and composition he had no time, he claimed. It gave him "tone" to keep a secretary. For the last year he had employed Will Archer to come to the office every forenoon and assist him in that line, and as the young man was intelligent and quick-witted, he occasionally gave him little commissions outside, to assist him in detective work.

The employer thought he knew the employee well, but right there he made a great mistake.

By going to the hired room in Old King Coal's humble house Will frequently transformed himself, and became a being so different that Harker often met him without recognition. Transformed, he was Billy Blue Blazes, the Dodger of the Docks, a creation unique enough even for Old King Coal's society.

Will had answered truthfully when Azro ask-

ed how he occupied his spare time, but had told only a very small part of the facts, and Azro was none the wiser.

The detective's mail never was heavy, but it often required considerable care. On this morning it was soon disposed of, and the two left the office.

Will was still perplexed in regard to Captain Beebe. Either that man had been greatly wronged by his sister's verdict, or else he was not only a scoundrel, but a most artful hypocrite. Those sobs of miniature thunder haunted the young double-character detective, and, as Harker had no use for him then, he returned to Old King Coal's and metamorphosed himself once more.

As Billy Blue Blazes he entered Mrs. Rawlins's presence.

She and her boy were not much the worse for their bath in the North River, and both were very grateful to him. He was earnestly thanked for all he had done.

"Wal, wot's yer programme, now?" he asked, in the dialect of the Dodger of the Docks. "Go in' home?"

"We have no home," the widow sighed.

"Do you still reckon Cap Beebe is so bad?"

"I know it! oh, I know it!" she wailed.

"An' he yer brother?"

"Yes, my brother."

"Why should he want ter cremate yer?"

"Please excuse me if I do not explain."

"Why, cert, ef ye say so, though I'd like amazin' ter know *why* all this has been done. I've jest seen Cap Beebe."

Mrs. Rawlins clasped her hands in alarm.

"Is he looking for me?"

"He thinks you're dead."

"Thank Heaven!"

"An' he cried like a baby, an' sobbed so he pulled the tacks all out o' the office carpet."

"The hypocrite—the artful villain!"

"Don't you think he felt so bad as he pretended?"

"I know he did not. His sobs and tears might deceive a stranger, but they are nothing new to me. It always has been his way to make a pretense of having a tender heart, and he invariably sheds tears freely when he has a point to gain. He is a heartless, soulless man!"

"Harlem fleas! you don't say so!"

"Give no heed to his tears; he is most dangerous when he weeps. He is treacherous and deceitful. He is an accomplished dissembler and, I repeat—a very dangerous man."

This reiteration was made with a manner of such sincerity that Billy could no longer doubt that Simon Beebe was just what was charged against him. He let that point rest, but explained that the mariner had hired a detective to learn who had burned the schooner.

"If so, he set the fire himself," the widow declared. "This last move is a mere ruse of his. He would not dare to make it if he had taken any one into his confidence. Not only did he conspire to burn us alive, but it was his own hand that started the blaze."

"Had he cause ter hate ye?"

"No, no; I never did him harm. It is only his own evil heart and wicked purposes."

"But there was a motive?"

"I prefer not to speak of that."

The widow was a mild woman, and she retained her patience fully under this questioning, but Billy felt that it would be folly to urge her further then. She either would not, or dared not, explain more. So the Dodger abandoned the attempt and left the house, but that did not mean that he had abandoned the case;—quite the contrary!

He went down to the dock again, to see the schooner.

There was but little left to suggest what a craft she had been.

The fire was all out; the firemen had gone, and the next step was action to clear the ruin away. No bodies had yet been found inside.

Earlier in the day there had been a crowd at the pier to see the sight, but the number of curiosity-seekers had fallen off as the busy part of the day arrived, and a line of policemen kept back the few who came.

Billy was not subject to the same restrictions. All policemen along West street knew the supposed vagabond of the docks, and liked him for his good humor; and now, when Billy saw Captain Beebe on the pier and expressed a wish to join him, one of the officers playfully poked him in the ribs with his club and exclaimed:

"Get along, you hoodlum! You'll never be shut out of any place but an honest men's convention!"

"Sure, and you'll not be there to shut me out!" retorted Billy, with a grimace, as he

dodged past the blue-coat and advanced toward Beebe.

The patrolman looked after him thoughtfully. "If that boy had a level head, instead of a rattle-pate, he would make a glorious detective. I never saw such an imp for poking his nose into everybody's business."

Billy approached Captain Simon, who was at intervals groaning dismally.

"Hullo, mister!" quoth the Double Detective. "You seem ter be in mortal pain. Got an ache in yer stomach?"

Simon regarded him tearfully.

"The ache is in my heart."

"Better hev it pulled!"

"Boy, make not light of distress."

"Nary time! Wot's up, though?"

"My poor sister and her child were burned here last night."

And he pointed to the ruin.

"Harlem fleas! you don't say so! Who is heir to their bonds an' cash?"

The captain had been looking at the blackened heap, but he turned suddenly at the question and looked hard at Billy.

The happy-go-lucky face reassured him, if he had any suspicions, and he replied:

"Speak not of such matters at the hour of death."

"Kinder hurts yer feelin's, eh? All right; I'm mum. But here comes a two-legged man. Is he one o' yer crew? Has kind of a sailor-like cut o' jib."

"I don't know him."

Over the pier, with a long, free step, came a roughly-clad, bewhiskered, bronzed-faced man, who seemed to be about forty years old. As soon as Billy saw him fairly and read his expression, it became evident to him that the new-comer was not there on any trivial errand.

"He's on the war-path, sure pop!" Billy at once decided, a prophecy that proved correct, for the stranger walked up to Captain Beebe, seized him by the arm, and turned him violently about until his face was toward the wreck.

Then the new-comer's free hand was extended, the index-finger pointing at the schooner.

"Look at your work!" he exclaimed, in an intense voice.

Simon was startled; he struggled, but in vain.

"Let go my arm, sir!" he blustered.

"Never mind your arm! Look there! Look at the ruin; the sepulcher of a good woman and her child!"

"What is that to you?"

"What is it to any honest man?"

"Is that what you claim to be?" sneered the mariner, no longer thinking of weeping. "And who are *you*, anyhow?"

"I am Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia."

"Then you'd better go back there, at once. You will get your head broken if you molest men in New York. Let go my arm, or I'll throw you into the dock!"

"No you won't, Simon Beebe, for you are not man enough to do it. I have measured you, and you may as well know the truth. I am the better man, every way. Offer an act of violence, and I will chastise you as I would a mad dog!"

It was Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, that was furnishing the violence now, and he was doing it so earnestly that Billy gazed at him with wide-open eyes and mouth.

A very turbulent fellow, this bewhiskered person from the Province seemed to be, and he shook the bulky mariner in a way which made the latter's face grow red.

"You are crazy as a March hare!" Beebe ejaculated.

"Better that than to have such a monument to my deeds lying by a pier of New York. Look again, Simon Beebe; see the black waste before you, and remember what it was before you did your foul work last night."

"What do you mean, sir?" Beebe retorted, angrily, but with fear manifest through the defiant surface.

"Why did you send all your crew away last night? Why were the doomed persons the only living creatures on board the schooner when the fire started? Why?"

"My crew asked for leave of absence, as they often did, and, as usual, I granted it. What of it? What do you mean to insinuate, scoundrel?"

Before Dave Doyle could answer, the sound of horses' hoof-strokes on the pier caused all to look that way, and down toward them came a stylish turnout, with a uniformed driver on the box and two ladies inside.

The driver halted by the group already there.

"Perdition!" Billy heard Beebe mutter, under his breath.

One of the ladies drew Billy's attention. She was young and beautiful, and in her face there was a threatening, accusing something, vague, but distinctly felt, which warned him of more trouble to follow.

The mariner showed a disposition to shrink from the steadfast gaze she fixed upon him, but there was no escape.

"Captain Beebe," she cried, "where is your sister?"

There was a visible struggle on his part, for his face betrayed his mind, but the control of years stood by him even then, when he could get his hand on the wheel, figuratively speaking.

His face grew sad, and he returned:

"Haven't you heard the terrible news, Miss Eastman?"

"Is it true?"

"Only too true!"

"And Mrs. Rawlins perished in that place?"

"She did. Oh, my poor sister!"

Big tears rolled down Simon's face, and Billy expected him to break out in his thunder-sobs, but the young lady nipped the demonstration in the bud.

"I don't believe it!" she cried.

"It is only too true."

"Simon Beebe, don't think you can deceive me! I am not so ignorant of your ways that I cannot grasp the meaning of all this. I say it is a trick on your part. You think you can deceive every one and gain your ends, but the game will not work. I brand your statement as false!"

Vehemently making this accusation, she turned to Doyle.

"Sir, are you one of Beebe's sailors?" she added.

Dave's bronzed face grew redder, and he turned partly away.

"No, ma'am; I'm from Nova Scotia," he replied awkwardly.

A quick change appeared in the lady's face; she looked at Doyle in startled wonder; she partially started up from the seat, and then sunk back, gasped, and fainted dead away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOWNFALL OF A CITIZEN.

BILLY BLUE BLAZES saw all, heard all that occurred, but the events crowded after each other so rapidly that he had no time to analyze them, even if analysis would have availed anything.

The greatest surprise of all was when Miss Eastman fainted. It was so sudden, so unexpected, so unexplainable, that Billy was simply dumfounded. She was a strong, healthy girl, and anything of the kind was not to be looked for.

Why had she fainted?

He could not surmise.

But Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, took a quick step toward the carriage, as if to assist her—then stopped short. His hands fell idle to his side; he looked, but was a passive spectator.

The second lady in the carriage regarded Miss Eastman in dismay for a few seconds, but soon rallied. She had not the strong nerves of her younger companion, and usually carried a restorative for smelling purposes, and acted the invalid. In this case she rose superior to her weakness; it was Helen who was afflicted—she must be the staff of support.

She whisked out the hartshorn bottle and applied it to the young lady's nostrils.

Captain Simon Beebe shrugged his shoulders.

"What will she do next?" he muttered.

"Punish you!" retorted the elderly lady.

"She had better look to herself. I always knew she had the devil's own temper; now, it seems it is getting the better of her. Spite, ugliness, temper and malevolence have brought on a stroke of apoplexy!"

"Wretch!"

"An old maid's opinion!"

"Better that than an old bachelor's evil thoughts. An old maid *may* be good for something—a bachelor is *sure* to be good for nothing that is good!"

"Bravo fer you, mum!" exclaimed Billy Blue Blazes. "You got in a sockdolager right between his eyes, then, an' I'll bet he won't come up fer the next round. Time, Simon!"

He looked around inquiringly, but saw Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, quietly getting away from the vicinity. The irrepressible Dodger was tempted to follow in order to know more of him, but decided to remain there for the moment.

The elderly lady was busy with Helen East-

man, while the captain looked on sullenly and ill at ease.

Billy sidled up to him.

"Say, Simon, they're kinder jumpin' on yer neck, ain't they?" he murmured.

"I am a wronged man."

"I suspected it, b'mighty."

"No one can rightly accuse me of doing wrong."

"Give us yer claw, Simon! Your opinion an' mine run in the same channel, like car-hosses on Broadway. But there's an awful spite back o' them. Why is it? What's their grudge?"

"Providence only knows."

"I hate to see a man 'threwed down,' b'mighty! Et ain't accordin' ter our American principles ter allow a combine ter hop on a good old gent. Kin I help you? Ef so, warble the ways an' means, an' yer Uncle William will be up an' doin' fer you. See?"

Simon regarded the speaker more attentively. Voluble as Billy was he had the physique of a man, or looked to have, in his dock-character suit, and he now assumed a peculiar squint of eye which gave him a lawless appearance. Perhaps that squint affected the mariner, for he answered:

"If I should want you, where are you to be found?"

"By day, strollin' along the river, lookin' fer bread, meat, hash, money or fun; by night, roostin' in some box on the piers, or in some lodgin' roost. My habitation is as varied as the smells of Hunter's Point, an' as numerous as the fleas in Harlem. But my post-office box is always Old King Coal's basement bazar of business, and a note left there will always raise me in a few hours."

"Old King Coal? I know the place, and will remember. I may have work for you to do, yet."

Further conversation was prevented by the recovery of Helen Eastman. She came out of her swoon in a calm and systematic fashion, which delighted Billy, who had seen women of poorer nerves; but as soon as she was fully herself she flashed a quick glance around.

Then disappointment fell over her face, as if she failed to see some one who was wanted.

Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, had vanished.

"Let us drive away," urged the second lady.

"Wait, Miss Peters!"

Helen turned to Captain Beebe again.

"Your advice, which has succeeded so well with others, does not deceive me," she added. "No one perished in the schooner!"

"I only wish it was true," the mariner replied.

"You have spirited Mrs. Rawlins away."

"And the darky, too?"

"I know nothing about him; I speak only of Mrs. Rawlins. You doubted her loyalty to your cause, and took measures to remove a witness you could not control. I warn you that she must be produced. Refuse to do this, and I shall proceed against you legally."

"Young woman," Simon answered, "I greatly fear that when the ruins of the schooner are overhauled, which will be done this afternoon, the police theory will be confirmed. If no bodies are found there, I shall be glad to believe with you, but I swear I have not abducted my sister."

"Oh, I know your word, of old!"

"Always unjust!"

"Do not act the hypocrite, sir!"

Captain Beebe's face flushed. He could act the hypocrite well, and weep on demand, but was not wholly proof against such sharp speeches. He hated Miss Eastman, and was chagrined to find how well she knew his character, even if she erred in the solution of the night's mystery.

He stood as meek as possible, while she eyed him with cold disdain. Finally she aroused and glanced around the pier, as if again seeking for some one. Seeing nobody, she gave the mariner a parting shot:

"You may well look to the future with dread, for the hour of vengeance is near at hand. When it comes you will be lost in the flood!"

Turning she gave an order to the driver, and that machine swung his horses around and drove off the pier. Beebe made no attempt to stop her, but watched in silence while the carriage passed the police line and started on up West street.

While thus occupied he was curiously regarded by Billy, but the Dodger said nothing until Beebe turned his attention to nearer scenes.

"Them women are clippers, ain't they?" the boy then commented, shaking his head gravely.

"What do you make of it?"

"Looks ter me as ef they had got a spite ag'in'

you, an' wanted ter sail in without rhyme or reason, an' chew yer ear off."

"That's it; and they have no reason for their grudge. It is just prejudice. I would not care so much were it not for my sad bereavement. Just think that I should be so abused at this time!"

And the mariner heaved a mighty sigh.

"Ef I kin help you, say the word," Billy urged.

"I believe you can. A shrewd lad like you can do wonders. Just now I know of nothing—Wait! Didn't you think that Dave Doyle's manner peculiar?"

"Had a jag on, didn't he?"

"Do you think that was it?"

"I reckon so."

"That may be it," remarked Simon, with an air of relief. "He troubled me, at first, but the sudden way in which he left here indicates an erratic notion in his head. I guess I need not think of him. As for you, go often to the basement you mentioned; I may have need of you at any time."

"Correct fer Hannah! You'll find me ready ter trot my stumps fer you. So-long!"

Billy would not have been so ready to leave Beebe if he had not had another idea in his mind. Every one in this case had adopted the policy of keeping silent, but that did not affect Billy. The schooner had been burned by an incendiary, and human life jeopardized. This was something the authorities did not want hushed up, if certain persons did.

It occurred to him, that Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, was a person whose acquaintance he might make with profit.

Had not Mr. Doyle accused Simon bluntly?

Had not Helen Eastman fainted at sight of Doyle?

What did it all mean?

Revolving these matters in mind, the Double Detective hurried from the pier, but it proved no easy task to find Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia. The latter had indeed vanished, and, after a general cruise around the vicinity, he was about to give it up and go home when he became witness to a street altercation.

Hearing loud voices he hurried in that direction, and found a crowd collecting around two quarreling men. One was a short, broad, typical tough who looked as if he were a bright light in some city gang; the other was a colored man, and—Billy was alarmed when he recognized Wash Calhoun! This sable survivor of the schooner fire was supposed to be under cover where his safety would not be discovered, but, instead, he was in the midst of a broil with the tough.

Both were angry, and, also, anxious to impress the crowd favorably.

"Now, see here!" cried the tough. "I don't want yous ter give me any more ave yer guff, or I'll give you a t'ump in de jaw! See?"

"No, sah! I doan' see; an' you-un can't make me see!" stoutly declared Wash.

"I can't, hey?"

"No; you can't, hey!"

"W'ot'll you do, nigger?"

"I'll climb all over you, sah!"

"Oh! yous make me weary. You're a big 'stuff'!"

"I'm a 'stuff,' be I?" shouted Wash.

"You be, dat! You's a black chump!"

"An' you're a gorilla! Lord! ef I had dat head ob yours I'd s'pect ter scare myself inter fits, ebery time I looked in de glass; an' it's wuss wid you, fer you're a sneak an' a coward, sah!"

"Hi! w'ot's dat?" yelled the tough.

"You're a coward, sah!"

"Nigger, dat settles you; I've got ter do ye up. I'm Ducky Meegan, an' I don't take no guff. Put up yer dukes, fer I'm goin' ter t'ump ye in de jaw. See?"

Mr. Meegan shot out his big, grimy fist, but it did not land just where he expected it. Wash's hand interfered to protect his jaw, and the blow wasted its force on the air.

This abortive attempt irritated the tough, and he went in to whip Wash without delay. His surprise increased as his work progressed. Wash had put up his hands in a scientific way, and he soon demonstrated his ability to use them. He warded off most of Duck's blows, and dodged the others, and all the while danced around his opponent in a ridiculous style.

Grimacing grotesquely, he deluged Ducky with invitations to do something, and then perversely prevented him from accepting the invitation.

Meegan soon found the crowd taunting him with his failure, and summoned all his energy for a great effort.

Rushing forward, he struck out bravely. Somehow, he failed to connect, and swung around sideways. Before he could recover, Wash introduced his right fist to Duck's neck, and his left to his face, when the tough struck against an awning-post, bounced away, fell over a grocer's barrel, and brought up in a dirty gutter in a stunned condition.

He heard a murmur around him, but did not know whether it was the voices of fellow New-Yorkers or the waters of the Niagara, until, after a few moments, some one picked him up.

Then he looked feebly at the grinning crowd.

"Gents," he explained, gloomily, "my foot slipped on an orange-peel. See? Hold de nigger, an' I'll get up soon an' smash him. See?"

A jeering laugh indicated that the bystanders did not see.

CHAPTER V.

BILLY JOINS THE ENEMY.

BUT, Wash Calhoun was no longer present to await the return of Mr. Ducky Meegan's strength and prowess. Hardly had he knocked the tough out so decisively when a hand was laid on his own arm.

"G. Washin'ton, you want ter hustle off!" quoth a quiet voice.

Wash wheeled belligerently, anxious to tackle and annihilate this new adversary, but wilted when he recognized Billy Blue Blazes.

"Get a wiggle on, quick!" the Dodger suggested.

"Yas, sah; I's jest a-gwine," Wash agreed, meekly.

Billy retained his hold, and marched the colored gentleman off at once. Not a word was spoken until they were out of sight of the crowd. Then Billy paused.

"Mr. Calhoun," he frigidly remarked, "ef my recollection don't misserve me, you was ter keep indoors an' not let it be knowed you had escaped burnin' up. Them was Mrs. Rawlins's orders."

"Yes, sah," Wash agreed, humbly.

"Then why in the name o' the great jumpin' kangaroos of Kalamazoo be you here?"

"Deed, sah, it was all a mistake. I's at de house, sah, an' I—I—I got short o'—that is, I set out ter go from de hall inter de parlor, sah, an' I opened de wrong doah, an' afore I see'd my mistake, it blowed to an' I was shet out in de street, sah. Dat am a fack, on de honor of a Cah'luy gentleman."

"Wash, ef ever there's a liars' convention at Madison Square Garden, I'll enter you. You'd git the leather medal, sure-pop. But, this ain't a joke. You are dead, Wash; burned up in the schooner! You ain't buried yit, an' they may not take the trouble. Certain they won't ef you keep on prancin' erbout the streets. Shouldn't be a tall s'prised ef Simon Beebe heerd you're alive inside the hour. You ought ter be licked, G. W., when Mrs. Rawlins implored you not to show yourself on the street. I wish Ducky Meegan had done you up, b'mighty!"

"Deed, sah, I only went out ter git a bit o' terbarker."

"Done all yer mischief fer that, did yer? Wash, I'm ashamed o' you!"

Wash himself was ashamed, and he made a good many apologies and promises. Billy escorted him back to Old King Coal's and saw him safe inside the house. Then he called upon Mrs. Rawlins.

Anxious to know who Miss Eastman and Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, were, he told of the scene on the pier, but gained little light.

"Dave Doyle I never heard of, and I think you are in error in thinking him of any importance. Helen Eastman is a lady who, perhaps, ought to be my enemy, but I have sufficient sense of fairness so that I, certainly, bear her no ill-will. You can judge how Simon feels."

"Simon is hot under the collar."

"I am not surprised."

"Who, an' what, is Helen?"

"I prefer not to say."

"Be you goin' ter settle back an' let the world roll on without yer? Be you goin' ter forgive the roastin' you almost got in the schooner, an' raise nary a warble?"

"Ah! you don't know how I am situated! You don't know how I fear Simon Beebe!"

"Hev him arrested, an' he won't git chance ter harm ye."

"I dare not!"

"But Helen seemed interested fer you. Jest let me go an' tell her that you're all right, an' I reckon she will know w'ot ter do."

"No, no; you must keep your promise, and not tell any one that I am alive."

"An' you won't let me on ter the facts?"
"I cannot."

Billy was very much disgusted, but accepted the inevitable as gracefully as possible. He soon left the widow, transformed himself into Will Archer and went back to Azro Harker's office.

He was in hopes that developments would follow, there, but hours wore on, and he saw neither Harker nor Beebe. This inaction became so unsatisfactory that, with the probability of matters of interest, elsewhere, he determined to make still another change. He went to Old King Coal's, became Billy Blue Blazes once more, and started for the burned schooner.

He had not reached it when he suddenly happened upon Captain Beebe. The mariner was not alone, and Billy saw with some surprise that his companion was Ducky Meegan. The tough already had a black eye as a memento of his encounter with Wash Calhoun.

"Hallo!" Beebe exclaimed. "I was looking for you."

"Good! Here I be!"

"You spoke of helping me. Would you really like to enter my service, if well paid for it?"

"Cert!"

"You are well acquainted around here, aren't you?"

"Nobody's more so."

"Do you know, or, rather, have you to-day seen a big negro, very black, with blue flannel shirt and gorgeous blue necktie?"

Billy readily recognized Wash, but shook his head.

"He hain't been in my eye, boss."

"This man has seen him."

Beebe motioned to Ducky Meegan, who mechanically raised his hand to his discolored eye.

"D'ye want ter find him?" the Double Detective asked, innocently.

"Yes. I have reason to believe he is the cook of my vessel."

"What! he ain't come back ter life, has he?"

"There is a mystery about this matter," the mariner confessed, his gloomy face growing more downcast. "The workmen have been overhauling the schooner, and no bodies have thus far been found. There is a bare chance that this will be done later, but the chances are all against it. I now believe that no life was lost in the fire."

"That's right good news fer you."

"Yes."

The captain was about as enthusiastic as if he had just been sentenced to Sing Sing for ten years. He looked down at the sidewalk, his face being unusually long and glum, and, very likely, meditated on the joyful nature of the news for a few seconds, but kept his joy wholly concealed.

Then he raised his gaze.

"Yes, I believe everybody may have escaped. Certainly, Wash Calhoun did."

Ducky Meegan again caressed his discolored eye, while Billy felt like hunting Wash up and serving him as he had served Duck. The stupidity of the colored man in venturing out of the house had done great damage, as Beebe's next words proved:

"I have Mr. Meegan in my employ, and though he never knew Wash, he remembered seeing him."

"Yes, I did," Ducky agreed, frankly. "I looked at him in partic'lar. See?"

"Now, what I want is for you and Meegan to find Wash. Once found, Meegan will question him according to directions I have given. I have added you to my service, young man, for it is said few persons know so much of West street, its piers, and this part of the city, as you do. I'll pay you well for your trouble."

"I'm with yer, admiral," Billy agreed, promptly.

The mariner did not linger. He was ill at ease, starting nervously at trifles, and the Dodger easily understood that the latest discoveries had upset him. This was but natural. If the trio were alive, and he could not prevent hostile action on their part by some bold stroke, they might yet tell in a court of law that they had awakened from sleep to find the schooner on fire and every avenue of escape closed to them by some designing hand.

Beebe left his allies and walked away.

"Well, we's ter be pals," remarked Ducky.

"So it seems."

"I wouldn't go in wid you, only I think you're a good one. I only train wid de finest. See?"

"Bartain, boss."

"I reckon you's heerd of Ducky Meegan before. Everybody in de neighborhood of West street has heerd o' me, but et ain't every bloke

kin say he *knows* me. I'm choice as ter the company I keep. See?"

"I oo, Mr. Meegan."

"Call me 'Ducky,'" requested the tough, patronizingly. "I ain't no silk-stockin' dude, an' like ter be friendly wid all. On election day I'm Mr. Meegan, 'cause I've got a pull. See? My infloence is worth a good many votes. But this ain't biz. We're ter find de darky."

"Be ye sure you'd know him ag'in?"

"I be!"

Once more the tough felt of his neck and eye in a gingerly way, and then, seeing that Billy's gaze was upon the blackened optic, he added:

"I got up in de dark, las' night, ter take a pull at de growler, an' run smack ag'inst de gas-jet. Struck me right in de eye. See?"

"You've got eyes enough left ter find the darky."

"Now you're talkin', an' when I do find him I'll hit him a tump in de jaw!"

It was evident that Mr. Meegan's mind was as sane as his eye, and he went about the search with zeal. The day was fast drawing to an end, and though he would rather have met Wash by night than day—and with a club in his own possession—he was afraid the colored man would get away entirely.

So he tramped the streets diligently until nightfall.

Billy was not so energetic. He did not want to wear his shoes out on a bogus search, so he took life easy, rested more than he walked, but managed to meet Duck, now and then, and give color to his supposed fidelity.

Finally, the tough announced that they would give up the search for the time.

"We have an engagement ter meet de boss at my room, now, an' we'll go there at once. See?"

They went accordingly. Duck's room was not a palatial affair, being a small and dingy hole in a small and dingy house, but Captain Beebe joined them there. He heard their report gloomily, but without evidence of surprise. Then he abruptly inquired of Billy:

"Can you write?"

"I'm a jim-dandy at it."

"Couldn't imitate a certain hand, could you?"

"But I could; anything from Julius Cæsar's down ter Sariah Bernhardt's."

"If you can do that I have a job for you that will pay well. Here are pens, ink, and so forth, which I have brought. Show me what you can do."

CHAPTER VI.

DANGER!

BILLY, in his true characer as Will Archer, really was a skillful penman, and had not exaggerated in the least when he gave Beebe this estimate of his work. When the captain had spread out writing materials all was ready for him to prove the fact.

But he hesitated to do it.

Would it not seem suspicious for a street-Arab to be proficient in that line?

His hesitation was but brief. If Beebe had faith to try it, he would not grow suspicious when it was done, perhaps, and there was only one way of learning what plan the schemer had in mind.

So Billy proceeded to do his best, and the result made Ducky Meegan stare in wonder. Beebe looked pleased.

"Now, see what you can do at imitating this spider-work."

He spread out what had been one page of a letter. It was in a woman's hand, and was of the delicate, small-lined character which was once characteristic of all women. He proceeded to imitate it, and did so well that the captain applauded with great satisfaction.

"Now," he directed, "write what I tell you, never forgetting to imitate the copy. See?"

"Drive on!" Billy nonchalantly directed.

"Write as follows:

"DEAR MISS HELEN:—I take my pen in hand to inform you that the newspaper reports of my death are not true. I was not on the schooner, and, of course, was not in danger at any time. As the facts may not be made known at once—though well understood by them—I make haste to let you know I am all right. Now, Miss Helen, the time has come when I want to speak plainly to you. My past reserve will be explained more fully than ever. If you will come here, at once, I shall be glad to help you all I can. Of course you understand."

"Your friend,

"MARY RAWLINS."

Billy began to suspect what was coming before the last words were dictated, and his task became very disagreeable, but it was too late, to recede from his position.

He closed the letter in due form.

Simon surveyed it with satisfaction.

"That'll do," he commented.

"It's a giddy gusher!" added Mr. Duck Meegan, in profound admiration.

"That will be all for to-night, Billy," continued Simon. "You can go home and keep your mouth shut, and you shall be well paid for all your trouble. Wait a bit! We have forgotten the street and number. They must go in."

They were duly added, and then Beebe gave his younger ally five dollars and dismissed him.

Billy went away calmly, but in a state of mind far from being of like nature. He was in a dilemma. In order to get Beebe's secret he had put a dangerous weapon in the captain's hands, and now he was not so sure he could avert the danger he might have brought upon Helen Eastman.

Unless he could learn where she lived the note might result in her being decoyed away and put in Beebe's power.

"Mrs. Rawlins has got ter talk biz, an' do it mighty lively!" the Dodger decided, as he hastened toward Old King Coal's residence.

The widow was there, and a few pointed words were enough to rouse her from her old mood. She stated that, at last accounts, Miss Eastman had been living on West Fourteenth street, near Seventh avenue. Billy then rushed into his own room and made the quickest change of character ever seen in his record. A few minutes later he emerged from the house as Will Archer, hurried to the Elevated Road, and went up-town.

In due time he was at the Fourteenth street house, and a pull at the bell brought a servant to the door.

"Is Miss Eastman in?" he inquired, quickly.

"She don't live here no more!"

"No?"

"No, sir; she went away three weeks ago."

"Where does she live now?"

"We don't know. She didn't leave no address, an' we ain't heerd from her since."

"Isn't there any one in the house who can tell where she is?"

"I tell you she shook us all!" the servant explained, impatiently. "Nobody here knows."

There was no reason to doubt her sincerity, and Will turned and went down the stoop in a bewildered way. When writing the note for Simon Beebe he had realized what a power of evil it might become, if used as Beebe intended, but had comforted himself with the thought that he could frustrate the scheme and save her. But, now, it did not look that way.

Where was Helen?

The plott'rs knew and he did not, and, very likely, the letter was then on its way to serve as a decoy.

What was to be done?

"There's only one way. I can't stop her from starting, but can prevent her from entering the trap which has been set for her. If Simon gets her to go there, she will be imprisoned, or in some way misused. Right there Will Archer shall come into the game, and undo the harm done by Billy Blue Blazes. Two to one that Simon don't know me!"

It was a safe bet, for any one would be excusable for failing to recognize Billy in the slender, aristocratic youth now at the front.

The place to which Simon intended to decoy Helen was on Barrow street, and toward that place the Double Detective made his way in haste.

When he arrived, there was nothing visible to tell of dark plots and contemplated crimes; the street was as quiet as usual. He found the house, which was one of ordinary appearance, and showed no marked indication of life.

He began to pace back and forth, keenly on the alert for discoveries, but saw neither the expected carriage, Captain Beebe nor Ducky Meegan.

Time passed, and he grew nervous with waiting.

While thus occupied, some one came along the street who had a manner that at once attracted Will's attention. He saw at a glance that the man was no ordinary dweller on the street, but had some secret business in view. Closer scrutiny brought a discovery.

The man was the peculiar person who had announced himself as Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia.

What had brought him to Barrow street?

Doyle gave him a critical glance, hesitated, passed by, and then turned suddenly.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, politely, "but may I ask if you live near here?"

"Not on this street," Will responded, "but not so very far away."

"Do you know a man named Azro Harker?"

Will looked sharply at Dave Doyle, of Nova

Scotia. Did he know how near he was getting to the mark, or was it by chance he made this inquiry of Azro's apprentice?

"I believe he lives on Morton street."

"He is a Pinkerton man, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"What is his reputation?"

"All right, I guess."

Doyle frowned and looked thoughtfully at vacancy. Some idea was working in his mind, and Will would have given a good deal to know what it was. He essayed to learn, and bluntly asked:

"Why do you inquire?"

"Frankly," replied Dave Doyle, impulsively, it seemed, "he is keeping the company of men whose reputation certainly is not good, and I suspect that he has a most iniquitous scheme in mind!"

"Who are the other men?"

"A Captain Beebe, and a tough who is with him."

"Surely, you don't think a detective would do unlawful work, do you?"

"This much is certain," replied Dave Doyle, with energy. "Beebe and this Harker have put their heads together, and they have serious work on hand for to-night. They are going to decoy a certain woman somewhere. Who, and where, I know not. The original plan brought in Barrow street, and that's why I am here, but it's only a hopeless movement; the plan has been changed!"

"What is it now?" Will cried sharply, realizing that the situation was growing more serious, and that, if Dave Doyle was sincere, he was wholly off the track.

"I don't know. Beebe got some boy to forge a letter which was to be the decoy, but, right after, he met Harker, and they put their heads together and changed the plan. Harker wrote a second letter, changing the place of meeting. It is in some business building. Beebe's object was to get a key the unknown lady carried, and then break into the business place aforesaid. It was the key to valuables Beebe wanted. But it seems the detective has access to that building, so the lady is to be decoyed there, instead of to this street."

"Do you know who she is?" Will asked, eagerly.

"No, but I have a fear that 'tis a lady I know."

"Helen Eastman?"

"Ha! what do you know of her?"

Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, had been in a nervous, uncertain and despondent mood, but he aroused and asked the question sharply, eagerly.

"She is the marked victim of the decoy," Will answered.

"Great heavens! what is to be done? Something must be done, but what?"

"You are interested in Helen, I take it?"

"Interested? I am; the word is feeble to cover the case. But this talk is idle. What can we do—what, to baffle these villains? I know not what infamous act they may have in mind. It may be—murder!"

Dave Doyle was greatly excited, but the Double Detective had begun to get a grasp on his case, and he was as cool as a veteran in the business.

"I know something about Azro Harker's affairs, and feel sure I can name the building. He does have keys to a certain business place, and, I feel sure, to one, only. I can lead the way there, and, unless we are too late, we can baffle the game now on foot. But, stranger, it seems impossible that Harker can be in in any evil work."

"What I have told you I learned by listening to him and Beebe as they talked. Their own mouths condemned them!"

"Enough! I see a cab at yonder corner. We will engage it, and go to Nassau street at once. Come!"

They hastened to the cab. It was disengaged, and they were soon whirling southward.

"Drive fast!" was Will's direction. "It's a matter of life and death!"

And then they awaited the result.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAP, AND WHAT IT CAUGHT.

LIBERAL pay had enlisted the driver thoroughly in the cause, and the cab rolled along as fast as he dared send it, with the danger of arrest for fast driving in mind.

Will Archer had settled down to the composure which was so much a part of his nature, but Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, was so plainly nervous that Will finally broke forth with the remark:

"Mr. Doyle, it is the rule in New York for every man to mind his own business and ask no personal questions, but I want to make an exception in this case. May I ask who you are?"

"I am Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia."

"That won't go. You are a New Yorker; no Blue Nose about you. I'd like to know more about you, and assure you it is perfectly safe for you to speak out. I will not betray your confidence, and I would like to know who you are."

Dave Doyle hesitated, and then returned:

"I am a dead man!"

"The dickens you are!" Will exclaimed.

"Yes; I'm dead and buried."

"Spiritualism is confirmed, and emphatically."

"I am not a spirit; simply a dead man."

"You're a pretty lively corpse."

"In these days of sharp business competition, even a corpse has got to be lively or get left. Why I jest at this moment I know not, but my nerves are all unstrung. I think of Helen, and ask myself, Where is she? To what danger is she exposed? If our clew is right, shall we be in time to save her?"

The Double Detective did not fail to see that Dave Doyle had evaded the question as to his identity, but the matter remained as it was. If he did not see fit to confess, he could use his own will—for the present, at least. But Will's early opinion that he was a man of mystery had received fresh confirmation.

As the detective had claimed, Dave Doyle was more of a New Yorker than a Nova Scotian in his manner, and the former suspected that his coarse garments and whiskers were as much of a disguise as his claim of provincial nationality.

They neared Nassau street, however, and every thought became fixed on the work in hand. The cab was halted on Broadway, but left subject to their future call, and then they crossed to Nassau.

Will was well acquainted with the place they were nearing. Among others there were brokers who did business there, and as they owned the building, and had often employed Azro Harker professionally, he had a key to their office door, as well as to the street door.

They considered this a precaution against burglars and fire, as he often was in his downtown office at night, but if Dave Doyle's claim was correct, there was need of protection against the protector, perhaps.

On gaining sight of the building, they found everything quiet, and the outer door proved to be locked.

"We are too early, or too late," Dave Doyle observed.

"Too early, if we are at the right building. They have not had time to do their work. Let us secrete ourselves in a doorway and await developments."

This was done. Even Will found waiting tedious, however, and Dave Doyle showed in every way how great the strain was upon him.

"What if we are at the wrong place?" he murmured.

The Double Detective could not answer.

There was a ring of feet on the sidewalk as a man came along at a quick pace.

"Harker!" the Nova Scotian exclaimed.

He was right; it was Will's employer; and the hopes of the watchers rose higher. Azro unlocked the door of the spotted building and entered. Dave Doyle was in favor of following at once, but the Dodger counseled delay, arguing that the others had not yet come. A few minutes passed, and then Harker emerged. He locked the door, but put the key under the end of the step, and then walked away.

"Good!" commented his apprentice. "As soon as he is out of sight we will get a wiggle on and explore the place. The others are coming, and know where to find the key. It would not do to leave the door unlocked, for the patrolman on this beat would discover it when he came along and tried the door. They are playing a careful game. Now, wiggle!"

They hurriedly crossed the street.

"Here's the key!"

Will held it up in triumph, and then inserted it in the door and turned the bolt back. They entered. Will ran up-stairs and found the office of the brokers lighted, but no one present. The counter-plotters were now on the scene of action, but a difficulty confronted them.

If they left the door open, the patrolman would be likely to learn of its condition and spoil everything; if they locked themselves in, the key would be on the wrong side of the door, and those who came after could not enter.

What was to be done?

It was decided that Dave Doyle should lock Will in, put the key where it belonged, and then wait until Will could let him in. There were serious objections to this plan, but they could think of none better.

In a short time the Double Detective was alone in the building, behind the locked door. He did not stay in the lower hall, however, but went up-stairs, found a hiding-place and settled down.

He had time to think, and was to be excused for growing doubtful and nervous. What if Dave Doyle should play him false and leave him locked up there? What if no one else should come?

If found there in the morning nothing could save him from being arrested as a burglar. He shook his head doubtfully.

"Clearly, Billy Blue Blazes is a better man than Will Archer!" he muttered. "Billy never got in a fix like this. Will Archer is less up in the ways of the world, I fear. Billy is noted for sharpness. It remains to be seen whether Will is a 'chump,' or not. I've trusted Dave Doyle fully, though he and I, playing as partners, hide our hands one from the other. Reckless work! What will come of it?"

Developments began to occur. He heard the outer door unlocked, and two men entered. The gas was always left burning slightly in the lower hall at night, and Harker had turned it up still more. Will easily recognized Simon Blake and Ducky Meegan.

They talked in low tones for a few moments, and then the tough ascended the stairs.

"Hi, Ducky!" he commented, looking around, "wot wouldn't you's give ter be loose here, all by yerself? I'm t'inkin' dere is more of de reel stuff ter be got by swipin' wot I kin lay me hands on, but I s'pose I'll hev ter stick ter de old codger. But I'll bleed him! Seef!"

The ruling passions and habits of life are strong at all times, and Duck, even when supposedly alone, uttered the password of the tough brotherhood, "Seef?" as unctuously as if impressing an audience.

Then he hastened to the front window and began to look out attentively.

"What next?" the Double Detective muttered.

Hark! Did he hear wheels on the street? He listened; the sound ceased.

Ducky rushed to the head of the stairs.

"They hev come!" he whispered, loudly.

"Get a move on!"

Beebe carefully unlocked the door, and, leaving it ajar, fled up-stairs. He hastened to the lighted office and pushed the door ajar. Enough light came out to dispel the gloom.

"Now to do or die!" he exclaimed.

"I seen de gal in de cab," added Ducky.

"Well, get out of sight. Your face would scare her out of her wits. Now, be wise!"

"Oh, you's kin trust me, old man. I'm no 'stuff!' Seef?"

Mr. Meegan made a gesture like a Bowery tragedian and retired into darkness and obscurity, profoundly satisfied with himself. Beebe fell back into the office, and ensconced himself back of the door.

Will Archer waited with painful eagerness. Although, as he understood the matter, Helen Eastman was said to be at the door, he was not prepared to believe she would venture into the building.

True, it was lighted and looked harmless enough, but if she was as well informed as a New York girl ought to be, she must be aware that, though business was still going on in certain lines up-town, it was quite a different thing on Nassau street. Would not the silence of the street warn her that business in legitimate lines was suspended?

But all these speculations ended when the street door opened.

Two forms clad in feminine apparel appeared.

"Helen!" Will muttered.

She came up the stairs in a calm and unhesitating way. Her companion walked in a stiff and jointless manner, and looked like a superannuated family-servant—lean, bony and morose.

Helen indicated the office.

"This is the place," she observed.

"Um!" grunted the companion, ungraciously.

They passed the open door, which then swung to in some way not visible, whereupon Ducky Meegan sped down the stairs. It was the work of only a moment to turn the key, after which he returned and made another Bowery gesture.

"'Tis done!" he declared, tragically. "Ducky, you are a tramp. Yer ought ter be a per'fesh-nal detective, an' at de head of de force. Seef!"

He walked into the office after Helen and her escort, whereupon Will Archer ran lightly down the stairs. It was no longer a task to turn the key one way than the other, and he opened the door at once.

Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, was there, looking pale and anxious.

"What is being done?" he demanded, feverishly.

"We'll see, later."

The Dodger relocked the door.

"Are you armed?" he added.

Dave Doyle displayed a revolver.

"Is there need of it?" he inquired, in a deep whisper.

"I don't know yet; I hope not. But there may be fighting. We must protect Helen."

"Boy," the Nova Scotian returned, "there are six bits of lead in that thirty-two-caliber toy. If any man dares try to harm her, he gets sent to the last account. Six cartridges—two for the bullet-head tough; four for Simon Beebe. But I think he would not need them all!"

There was a desperate calmness in the speaker's manner, coupled with an undercurrent of suppressed passion, which awed Will. Silently he led the way up-stairs again.

CHAPTER VIII.

WORDS. PUNCTUATED WITH REVOLVERS.

PREVIOUS investigation had shown Will and Dave Doyle that they could hear and see all that occurred in the office without exposing themselves to Beebe's view. Thus, they would be able to get the run of affairs, and ready to protect Helen, if necessary, and yet keep the enemy in ignorance of their presence.

Between the office and the hall was a very large window, as long as a door, and reaching to within three feet of the floor. The lower part was of stained glass; the upper, of plain glass.

While waiting Will had raised the lower sash slightly, and as the security of the stained glass was increased by a shade which could be moved freely, they had a chance to reconnoiter fully, yet safely.

Both hastened to gain position.

They saw Helen and her companion facing Captain Beebe, while Ducky Meegan was at the rear. Knowing what ideas his face must inevitably bring up, Simon had ordered him to keep back.

By that time Miss Eastman knew she was trapped, and her manner was indignant and defiant.

"Your lie has succeeded well, sir," she was saying. "What next?"

"I want to talk business."

"I have no business with you!"

"Pardon me!"

"I say that you and I have nothing in common. You are my enemy, and I hate and despise you."

"Wouldn't it be well for you to be more civil?"

"Why?"

"Prudence would suggest it."

"I understand the threat, but it will avail you nothing. I am not afraid of you!"

Her manner confirmed the assertion, and Simon looked dazed. He had thought that by bringing her into such a situation all her courage would give way, but the very opposite state of affairs existed. She was as calm as if in her own home, with friends around her.

"Let that pass," he finally answered. "I want to talk business with you."

"Perhaps you hope to abduct and shut me up, as you have done Mrs. Rawlins?"

He made a gesture and passed the insinuation by.

"Miss Eastman, yonder safe is your property."

"I am aware of it."

"You have the key now in your possession—"

"How do you know?"

"Because you always carry it. That I have learned on authority too good to be disputed. I repeat, you have the key to this safe, and the combination to work it. Judge Zelland invented the safe. First, to open it, one turns an erratically shaped key in the lock. Then comes the combination, as in most safes. You have the key; you know the combination. Will you favor me by giving me both?"

Modestly as the request was worded, Simon's dogged manner showed that he did not expect her to agree, and was ready to follow up the request with an iron hand. He had not risked so much to turn back now.

Strangely enough, Helen remained calm. Will Archer was alarmed for her, and, too, was

amazed at her indifference to danger. Beebe had been evil enough to try and burn his own sister in the schooner; would he be more merciful to an enemy?

Firmly Helen responded:

"I will not give them to you!"

"Think again."

"Judge Zelland's money has been your doom, Simon Beebe. That your heart was always bad I cannot doubt, but his money stirred the evil in your nature into activity. I advise you in all sincerity to drop your schemes."

"So you can get the money?" the captain sneered.

"Did not Judge Zelland give it to me?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Then produce Mrs. Rawlins, and let her tell her story."

"I am talking to you, not her."

"Miserable old man! Wifeless, childless, with enough of your own to take you comfortably through life, you will yet sell your honor to grasp more; to grasp what you know is not yours. You know that Eiric Zelland never intended you to have his money."

"He made a will in my favor," cried Simon.

"Yes, but how?"

"How! Honestly! There was no secrecy, no skulking, no underhand work."

"Was there not? How about the drug given at night, to make the old man ill and cause him to think he was dying? How about the bogus doctor who added to his fears? How about the exchange of a forged will for the genuine? How about the gathering of witnesses to see him sign the paper infamously substituted? How about your honor, in this case?"

"Nothing of the kind ever occurred," snarled the captain.

"Of course you deny it."

"The fraud came later, madam, when you duped the old man into signing a will—"

"So you admit that the one in my favor was signed subsequent to that in your favor?" quickly interrupted Miss Eastman.

Beebe bit his lip fiercely, and looked askance at Helen's companion. Had she heard the unguarded admission? There could be but little doubt of it. Although she stood there like a statue, grim, silent, bony and homely, it was to be presumed she had the usual capacity for hearing.

"We wander," he finally said, sullenly. "Will you produce the key?"

"No!"

"Then I shall take it by force!"

"I warn you not to try it."

"I warn you not to resist. See! I am here with a stout, resolute man—"

"An ignorant wretch, more brute than human!" retorted Miss Eastman.

Ducky Meegan erected his head, stared in wonder at her lack of judgment and audacity, and relapsed into his old state, after a Bowery gesture.

"You are wholly in my power," Beebe persisted.

"Well?"

"I am going to have that safe open—"

"Why?"

"The unjust, or forged will of Eiric Zelland shall never see the light of another day. It was an infamous piece of work into which you seduced him with those low and crafty arts known only to women; a work which Zelland, in his right mind, would have repudiated. But he had grown imbecile—"

"Remember that the will in your favor bears a date subsequent to that in my favor!"

Simon uttered a forcible exclamation. Again he had made an error—but what did it matter? He had gone to an extreme already. Having made himself liable to the law by decoying Helen there, and making such demands upon her, he might as well show his hand as to mask it, perhaps.

"Enough of foolish talk!" he cried, savagely.

"Will you give up the key?"

"No!"

"Meegan?"

Ducky came forward and made a tragedian-like bow.

"At yer sarvice, boss! State the case, an' yer will shall be done ef New York runs red in gore. When I undertake to do a thing I never get left. See! Ask any one along de North River, an' dey'll tell yez dat me word goes every time. Et takes a boss ter down me. See?"

"Hold that woman while I search her!"

"Sure, boss!"

Ducky turned his mismated eyes upon Helen, grimaced, and facetiously added:

"Come ter me arms, me sweet, pretty dear! Repose yer pink cheek on de lapel o' me coat,

an' hear de heart of a man beat on de drum o' yer ear. See! Now, darlin'—"

He had advanced, and was ready to wrap his arms around her, whereupon Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, left his post and stood by the door, eager to rush in and punish the ruffian.

The Double Detective watched with breathless interest.

He saw what was no more a surprise to him than to Meegan and Beebe.

Just as Ducky was about seize Helen the latter's companion, suddenly aroused from stony calmness, thrust forward a hairy hand, and presented to Duck's notice a revolver which, bearing full upon him, had a bore which seemed to be as big as the Fourth avenue tunnel; and then the supposed-to-be female companion growled in a deep base voice:

"Git, you gorilla!"

Mr. Meegan was not a coward, but there was a vast difference between looking into the eyes of a beautiful girl and the bore of a revolver, and he fell back in confusion.

"Ef you teches her," added the bony person, in the same deep base, "I'll pull all yer teeth with a bullet!"

The Double Detective drew a breath of deep relief. The voice, the manner of the person, and the big, hairy hand were more masculine than feminine, and it occurred to him that Helen had not come so unprotected as he had thought.

The female ally was very manlike, despite the skirts on the angular figure.

Evidently, this did not occur to Simon Beebe, for he glared angrily at Ducky.

"Why don't you do your duty?"

"Sure, I don't think it's me duty ter start a Potter's Field job. Dat gun looks bad. See?"

"Are you afraid of a woman?"

"Divil a woman do I see!" declared the tough.

"Eh?"

"Ef that homely, lantern-jawed, lop-sided telegraph-pole ain't a man, I'm a liar! Yes, be gum! an' I reckon he comes from Chicago, fer his feet is the size of a beer-keg. But it's de gun dat I don't want ter run up ag'inst. See?"

"You may as well know the truth," added Helen. "My companion is a man, and one amply able to protect me, being an old family servitor. An invitation to meet my lawyer here at nine o'clock in the evening would always have shown me the need of a protector. Coming at this time, and as it did, I quickly suspected that you were back of it, and that it was all a plot. I came, but I brought a protector. Captain, I am not trapped, after all."

"By the furies!" Beebe shouted, "you are not out of my hold yet. We have the odds in our favor, and I insist upon what I have said before. That safe must be opened!"

"And I decline to do so."

"Then we'll proceed on the old lines!"

The captain drew a revolver with a vicious jerk.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRUGGLE FOR THE MASTERY.

BEFORE Beebe could raise the weapon to the proper level for firing the voice of Helen's champion broke in, in his usual deep base:

"Stop! I've got the drop. Attempt to raise the hammer o' that revolver and I'll shoot you. Keep your hand down!"

"Better do it, boss," advised Ducky Meegan. "This ain't no time ter die, fer it costs too blamed much, an' a man, ain't good fer nothin', afterwards. See?"

"I am going to have that safe open!" doggedly persisted Simon.

In the mean while there had been a whispered conversation outside, brief but to the point. The Double Detective knew that Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, carried a revolver, and he crossed quickly to his ally and observed:

"The time has come to interrupt this talk. They are all hung up, in there, and if they progress further it will be to fight. You had better go in and back up Helen's champion. If possible, I wish to keep out of sight, so I will not be recognized by Beebe. Much depends on it."

"I take your word," Dave Doyle answered, quickly. "Show yourself only in case of emergency."

He opened the door and walked in just in time to make a comment as a follower to Simon's words.

"Try it, and others will take hand in the shooting!"

Every gaze was turned upon the Nova Scotian. Helen drew a breath which was almost a gasp, and then stood looking at him, forgetful

of all else. Simon changed color and grew wild-eyed.

"See here!" protested Ducky Meegan. "W'ot's dis bloke doin' in here?"

"He's a robber," muttered Beebe, weakly.

"Call de perleece, den."

"Yes; call the police!" Dave Doyle retorted. "Bring in all the witnesses you choose. Of course you want publicity; of course you do."

"Look-a-here, you's don't want ter speak in dat-way," Ducky cautioned, "or I'll give you's a tump in de jaw!"

"Do you want another black eye?"

"I did that by runnin' inter a team on Broadway," explained Meegan, candidly. "See?"

"Miss," continued Dave Doyle, addressing Helen, "your word is law here. Give your orders, please. Despite the threats of these ruffians, you are free to go home whenever you choose."

"I cannot go and leave these men here."

"They shall leave, at once."

"Shall we?" Simon cried. "We won't go!"

"Then I shall call the police."

"Do it! I am here by right; you are the interloper, the house-breaker. Perhaps you want to see the police?"

"I do. I want them to know how you decoyed this lady by means of a lie, and then threatened her, and tried to compel her to open the safe. Yes; I am eager to put the matter to the test, and will call the police at once, if you say so."

"Boss," interrupted Ducky Meegan, "we's may as well give up de game. I'm a law-abidin' gent, myself, an' though I hev a pull dat will keep me out of all trouble, I won't lift a finger in a cause where I'm likely ter be blamed. See?"

"You coward! will you desert me?"

"Now, don't go on dat way, boss. We don't want no trouble. We mustn't hev none."

Meegan managed to get in a secret wink on Beebe, and as the latter really regarded the cause as lost—he feared there were other men at hand—he changed his tactics.

"Nobody can say I ever did a dishonest thing," he remarked, frankly, "but we all get accused when we don't deserve it. So, too, I have been wronged without cause. But I yield all; I submit to injustice!"

Every one who heard him knew he was acting the hypocrite, but Helen and her friends supposed it was simply because he had lost.

He moved toward the door with Ducky Meegan at his heels. Ducky looked only at the floor, and seemed to be a crushed and saddened man. But he was wily and deceitful, as they soon found to their sorrow.

When abreast of Dave Doyle he suddenly straightened, and his huge fist shot out toward the latter's head. It was partially, if not wholly, a surprise, but remarkable agility enabled the Nova Scotian to save his head. Meegan, however, had put such force into the blow that he was not able to check his own impetus; he collided with Dave Doyle, and both tumbled on the floor.

Captain Beebe raised his revolver, eager to fight the opposition, but Helen's servant knocked him down without ceremony.

Meegan and the Nova Scotian rose in concert, both on the war-path, but the latter proved the quicker on the recovery. He smote Ducky on the nose, and the latter fell over on top of Beebe. Then they groaned in concert for awhile, for the fight was all gone out of them. Ducky looked humbly at his assailant.

"May we be allowed ter live?" he asked, mournfully.

"Not here! Get out of this building!"

"General, I'll show ye that I ought ter be in the six days' race at Madison Square Garden. My legs are pinin' for a prom on de ave. See?"

He raised himself in a gingerly way, fearing another blow, but, as it did not come, sidled out of the door, wiping away a little blood that had flowed from a bruise on his nose.

Simon Beebe was full of rage, but knew he was a loser. He had made a great show of using his revolver, but, in point of fact, dared not do it. His will was good, but he did not want to land in the hands of the police.

He went after Meegan, and the delegation saw them out of the building. Then the Double Detective hastened to join the group.

"My advice is that all of you get out of this place on the jump!" he declared. "Not one of us could prove in court that we had any right, or excuse for being here. Suppose those reptiles tell a policeman we are burglarizing the building? We would be in hock. I say, move on!"

"The advice is wise," Dave Doyle agreed, quickly. "Let us go."

He set the example by going down the stairs in a way which might have led to the belief that sudden and cowardly fear had seized upon him, but such was not Will Archer's belief. He had noticed that the man of mystery and Helen were looking at each other in a strange fashion, but that the Nova Scotian had cut it short by turning partly away. Now, the abrupt retreat down the stairs was only in keeping with what had gone before, and the detective was led to wonder more than ever what mystery encompassed the two.

Will turned off the gas in the office, and lowered that in the hall to about the same degree it had been burning at first.

Then all left the building, and he locked the outer door.

"I wish to thank you and—and—"

Miss Eastman hesitated and looked for Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia. He was nearly a block away, standing with his back toward them.

"I'll call David, miss," volunteered Will.

"No, no!" Helen exclaimed, quickly. "It is nothing—nothing!"

She moved toward the carriage, hesitated at the door, stole a glance at the eccentric Nova Scotian, and then entered the vehicle. Her servant followed. Then she suddenly turned and put out her hand to Will.

"To you, and to all who have helped me, I give my heartfelt and earnest thanks. I hope Providence always will raise you friends equally brave in the hour of your need."

"Thank you, miss; I feel fully repaid, and I think Dave Doyle will, when I tell him what you've said."

For a moment the two looked into each other's eyes; then Helen suddenly turned to the driver.

"Home!" she directed.

The carriage rolled away.

Will walked down to his associate. If the latter had been a mystery when they first met, and sight of Dave Doyle had caused Helen to swoon, he was more of a mystery now. Eccentric men were common in New York, but this man was more than that. There was a mystery in his life which Will did not understand, but desired to. He did not turn until the Double Detective walked up and slapped him on the back.

"Brace up!" the latter directed. "Helen is gone, and will not bite you."

"The adventure is over for to-night, I reckon."

"Yes."

"Then I'll go home."

"Where is that?"

"You will pardon me if I do not tell you."

"David, you are foolish to hem yourself in with a wall of reserve. Why not be frank and let your light shine? Take me for an ally, and let us exchange secrets. We both have them. You are plastered over with them, an inch deep. I am interested in the case in which we have become partners, and shall feel indebted to you if you will explain what mystery binds your life and Helen Eastman's."

"Bless me! there is none."

"David, you must think me green to believe it."

"Why do you think it?"

"You and Helen betray yourselves. You fled from her just now as if she was liable to eat you up, and—have you forgotten that she swooned at sight of you on the pier?"

"What do you know of my being on the pier? You were not there."

"I heard of it, all the same."

"Never mind; you are wholly in error. No mystery is attached to me—"

"Oh, you were only out for fun when you accused Simon Beebe, on the pier, of intentionally burning his sister alive in the schooner, eh?"

Dave Doyle regarded the speaker in silence. It was useless to persist that he was not a center of mystery, and he did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he really was becoming interested in the youth.

"Better confess," Will added, smiling.

"My friend, I can't help you along with your scheme. Like other witnesses on the stand, I shall have to plead bad memory, but I think you and I can be friends. I think—"

Dave Doyle stopped short. Will had suddenly seized him by the arm, and he now dragged him into a deep doorway.

"Azro Harker is coming!" Will whispered. "Lie low! It would knock my plans galley-west if he discovered me. I'm working a still-hunt, and all depends on keeping him ignorant of it!"

Harker was advancing along the street slow-

ly and cautiously, and, to Will's alarm, he began to peer into every recess and doorway.

"Great Scott!" the young detective added; "we're gone up!"

CHAPTER X.

THE FRESH ALARM.

THE Double Detective was really startled. He had learned enough of his employer that night to lose all faith in him. Captain Beebe had engaged Harker, and it was natural that the latter should help his client all he could, but he must have known that an estimable young woman was to be put in jeopardy when he gave Simon the key of the building. Further than that, it was a gross breach of trust to let any one into that place.

Azro had lost all standing in his apprentice's opinion, and the latter already had a vision of himself pitted against the older man.

But all would be lost if Harker found him near the building.

The latter came on, showing great caution, but proceeding in such a way that there was no reason to believe he had seen Will and Dave Doyle. But if he searched every doorway, discovery was certain.

"Keep back!" Doyle directed. "I'll face him, and tell a good story. Have no fear."

But Azro found it no easy matter to cover as much ground as he had undertaken without losing valuable time. He suddenly gave it up and started along at a rapid, but stealthy pace. Passing near the hiding pair he went on.

"I'd like to see him wiggle when he fails to find the key," the Dodger whispered, "but we should be fools to wait. Let's slide off like greased lightning!"

The retreat was hurriedly made, and not checked until they were several blocks distant.

There they parted. Another effort to put Dave Doyle into a confidential mood proved fruitless, but he gave way on one point and let Will know his address. More than that he expressed himself well pleased with their association, and said he for one would be glad to keep up the acquaintance.

The Double Detective went back to West Thirteenth street and, after puzzling for awhile over his case, fell asleep and put in the rest of the night in good style.

On the following morning he was at the office at the usual time, but Azro Harker had done better than usual, and was ahead of him. The senior detective was just removing the morning mail from a basket into which the postman dropped whatever was for them, through a slit in the door, and as he did so, a key dropped out.

It had a card attached, and had come through the mail.

Azro looked startled, and hurriedly detached the key and put it in his pocket. Then he studied the address for awhile, but, getting no satisfaction out of it, threw it in the waste-basket.

The key was the one which had played such an important part in the events of the previous night, but its recovery did not seem to give him pleasure. On the contrary, he sat for a long while in a brown study, and his face bore a gloomy expression.

Will Archer pretended to be unconscious of all this, but he was duly observant. More than this, he knew it was Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, who had mailed the key back to its owner. Such had been the plan decided upon.

That morning Azro gave the mail only casual attention. He was too worried and nervous to get down to business, and he soon informed his clerk that the day was his own, and left the office.

His associate did not fail to act almost as promptly. He went to Old King Coal's and proceeded to transform himself into Billy Blue Blazes. Then he sought Mrs. Rawlins's presence.

"Top o' the mornin' to ye, mum," he said, at once assuming the dialect and happy-go-lucky air of the Dodger of the Docks. "Hope I see ye in yer usual muscular health."

"I am well, thank you," she returned.

"W'ot be you sighin' fer, ef I may ask?"

"My mind is ill at ease."

"That mind o' yours will get ye into a p'ison fix, yet; it will, sure's you live. Ef I had it I'd apply a porous plaster to it, ev'ry night."

"Don't make light of my troubles."

"Harlem fleas! I wouldn't do it, nohow. I ain't built right fer a cold-blooded scoffer; my toes are too crooked, an' my nose too straight. Ef you was as considerate fer others as I be, half o' the sin an' sorrow o' New York would be yanked right up by the roots, an' left ter wilt in the sun like the pestiferous weeds they be."

"Have I failed to be considerate?" the widow asked, in surprise.

"Mum, you hev!"

"Toward whom?"

"Helen Eastman."

Mrs. Rawlins was silent.

"You ain't got a better friend between the Battery an' High Bridge than Helen," pursued Billy, warming to his subject. "She ain't afeerd ter stand up an' speak her little verse fer you, she ain't; an' you ought ter reciprocate. Et's high time, mum, fer us all ter git tergether an' make the enemy quake in their moccasins from fright, till their knee-bones play 'The Rogue's March.' It is, b'mighty!"

"You talk in riddles."

"Did you ever hear o' Mr. Edric Zelland?"

The widow started, but did not show the alarm he expected.

"What do you know of him?" she asked.

"Some compleration about his two wills, wa'n't there?"

"Who has been telling you this?"

"Mum, I'd like ter pour out the facks like a Niagara, but I'm goin' ter be sure I'm right afore I go ahead. You wouldn't tell me nothin', an' now I'm kinder gittin' a hold, I ain't chump enough ter lay my soul bare until I know how you stand. Observe?"

"Yes."

"Helen is your friend. Why can't you be hers?"

"Have you forgotten that Simon Beebe tried to burn me alive in the schooner?"

"No; nor that he tried ter burn you dead!"

"Would you have me go out and dare his hatred again?"

"Yes; under my protection."

"I feel that I owe certain things to Miss Eastman," the widow confessed, thoughtfully, "but I am not over the horror of that night. I remember the awful situation in the schooner, the way of escape cut off, and fire and smoke floating around us. After all that, it is hard to get courage enough to go out and risk it all again."

"You don't need ter, mum. You don't see enough good clothes on Billy Blue Blazes's figger ter make a female muskeeter a sun-shade, but et's different with Helen. She ain't no ragged imp o' the docks, an' ef I's you, I'd stand by her. I would, b'mighty!"

"If I know my danger, I also know my duty. Billy, don't urge this further, now; give me time to think."

"Sure; that's all right. Only I hope you'll git a Salvator move on yer thinker, an' make a Garrison finish. Now, mum, I'll go out an' perambulate, but I'll drop in subsequent an' swap opinions with ye."

Billy went out. He hardly knew what course to take. To dog Captain Beebe might, or might not, bring valuable discoveries, but, as he was in the enemy's confidence as the Dodger, he disliked to run any risks in that disguise by following the mariner. He was mechanically walking toward the North River when he met Ducky Meegan.

This person had not improved in looks. Not being able to grow cuticle to order he was still without the section he had lost the night before, in the encounter with Dave Doyle, and the round, red spot on the side of his nose was conspicuous.

"Hullo, kid!" he exclaimed.

"Hullo, Ducky-goat!" was the cool response.

"How's yer health this A. M.?"

"Wa-al, I ain't overly brisk," Ducky confessed. "Ye see, I was movin' the stove fer my sister, last night, an' I accidentally let the pipe fall. Et struck on my head an' jarred me a good bit; an' it broozed my nose. See?"

He pointed to the wound, and Billy, though not a little amused at his readiness at finding excuses for the hurts he received in personal encounters, consoled him in due form.

"But it'll grow ag'in, Ducky," the Dodger added. "Skin ain't nothin' but a fashion, no-how. We don't eat with it, see with it, nor hear with it. Reckon it's a superfluous article, anyhow. Don't you?"

"Et may be with some, but I'm short," the tough confessed, lugubriously.

"Well, w'ot's the news?"

"Nothin' at all."

"I hoped there'd be a chance fer fun."

"Ef there is, t'other fellers hev got it all," Ducky admitted, with a sigh.

"Where's the boss?"

"I dunno. Fact is, I don't hardly know where I be. Kid, things ain't w'ot they wuz, an' I may yit need all my perlitikel infloence ter keep on what skin I've got left."

"No chance fer a job, fer me?"

"I don't think so. De times is all out o' joint, See? Now, dere ain't an honest man in New York dan I be, an' I ought ter be in luck, but I's lost me graft. See? You'll excuse me, kid, but I'm goin' off somewhere ter drown'd my sorrers in whisky. Farewell!"

Mr. Meegan made the old tragic, Bowery-style gesture, and then walked away abruptly.

Billy went on toward his destination, and arrived at the pier where the schooner had been. The remnants were there no longer; what was left after the fire had been removed to make room for another vessel. It had been decided that the lack of any bodies in the schooner showed that every one had escaped, but while Beebe was puzzling over the case, others, not specially interested, had nearly dismissed it.

All had escaped—what did it matter where they were?

Billy was boisterously greeted by the men on the pier. He was known all along the lower end of the river, and liked by all.

"Come, Dodger," said one, turn to an' give us a lift on this job."

"Me?" Billy returned. "When you see me, let it be known, will yer? My paws wa'n't made ter scrub floors an' handle ropes an' hooks. See?"

"Oh, you're no good. You won't work, but spend all yer time along the docks. Is there anybody's business you don't ow? I s'pose you could give me points on my affairs."

"I could give yer neighbors some, an' I'd do it ef yer wife wa'n't a respectable woman. But I won't give ye away, old man, fer I don't want yer discharged."

A stream of railery was always directed against Billy when he appeared among the men who worked along the docks, but it always was good-natured, and they admired his ready, good-humored replies as much as they did him.

"Would you object ter a job ef it wasn't hard work?" added one of the men, more seriously.

"Give us yer tip, general."

"You think I'm jokin', but I ain't. A man wants ter hire divers ter search the bottom o' the dock."

"What fer?"

"The bodies o' the folks once supposed ter be burnt in the schooner."

"Ain't it Cap'n Beebe?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"We don't know. He sent an agent, but keeps out o' sight hisself. Now, Billy, you're a swimmer, an' ef you want ter earn a little o' the stuff, you never'll git a better chance. See?"

"Naw; I don't see," retorted Billy, with an air of disgust. "I ain't no grave-digger, no resurrectionist. I was born a gentleman, as you ought ter see by lookin' at me. Ef it wasn't fer the freckles on my face, an' a squint in my larboard eye, I could mix with the Four Hundred."

"Your place is with Reilly's Four Hundred."

"Sure, Harrigan made me an offer, but Tony Pastor put an injunction on it. I raise up a good bit o' jealousy, gents, an' so—"

The badinage was rudely interrupted. Down on the pier rushed a colored man with bulging eyes, open mouth and labored breathing, and he made straight for Billy. The latter discovered him, recognized Wash Calhoun, and ceased speaking. Something was wrong; he knew that at a glance.

"W'ot's up?" he demanded.

Pantingly Wash made answer:

"Mrs. Rawlins's boy has been stole!"

CHAPTER XI.

A HOT TRAIL.

"HARLEM fleas!"

Billy uttered the exclamation in a startled voice. If Wash Calhoun's words had not been enough to arouse him, his manner was; there was only one interpretation to be put on the revelation, and that was that Wash represented a panic that had fallen upon the inmates of Old King Coal's domicile.

"Yes, sah; dat am a suah fack!" Wash panted.

"How? When? Who did it?" Billy demanded.

"We doan' know; but de facks am dat a man come in, gobbled Leslie, an' lone took him away."

"Anybody on the track?"

"No."

"Home. Wash'ton!"

Together the two hastened back to Old King Coal's. They went in silence. Wash was too

much out of breath to say anything, and Billy was busy with his thoughts.

If Mrs. Rawlins's boy had been stolen, it was the work of Captain Beebe or some of his agents, and showed that the opposition was awake to some of the facts of the case.

They knew that Leslie lived; they probably knew Mrs. Rawlins had escaped.

When the house was reached they found Mrs. Rawlins weeping bitterly, while Old King Coal paced the floor with long and hasty steps.

"A vile outrage!" he declared. "Darn my best anthracite! but ef I was ten year younger I'd take the trail; I would, by General Jackson! My grandfather was a Revolutionary soldier, an' I reckon all the martial blood ain't died out."

"Teh me all about it!" the Double Detective urged.

"A man come in an' took the boy; a cowardly man—"

"Did you know him?"

"No. He was a sneakin'—"

"How did he do it?"

"The door must 'a' been left unlocked. He was a mean—"

"Where did he go?"

"Inter a cab. He was a diabolical—"

"Which way did he drive?"

"North. He was a thievin' skunk—"

"John Jones, you come down ter biz now, an' abuse him later in the day. I want the bottom facks, an' want 'em as quick as yer tongue kin reel off the yarn. Get a wiggle on, mister, for there is work to do. Ketch on!"

Old King Coal came down to business and explained as far as he was able. A man had invaded the house, seized little Leslie Rawlins, borne him away, and, making use of a cab, which probably had been in waiting, had disappeared.

Only Mrs. Jones had seen him distinctly enough to give any description, but she was precise and positive. More than that, by the time she had finished, Billy believed he had a clew to the whole case.

In the abductor he felt sure he recognized a man who was one of Azro Harker's most active agents, and it was clear that the detective had not been idle; he, too, had found a clew, and had worked so well that Leslie was now in the hands of Mrs. Rawlins's enemies.

Mrs. Rawlins continued her weeping, but Billy observed it without any very deep sympathy.

"Mum, you feel all broke up, an' it's natural; but ef you had took my advice you wouldn't been here. I advised you ter either turn on Simon an' skrush him under yer heel, or join hands with Helen an' let her make things solid fer you; but you wouldn't hear ter me. You held ter your ideas, an' the loss o' your son an' heir is the result."

"You don't know how I feared to act."

"Yes, I do; you demonstrated that fack, plain. But never mind, mam; I'm goin' ter git a wiggle on, an' I suspect I shall beat them pestiferous scamps out, yet. I do, b'mighty!"

"Hev you a plan?"

"Yes; an' my plan is ter git a wiggle on. Good-day, ladies an' gents; I'm off! Ef you hear of a dynamite explosion afore night, jest send a tip-cart ter pick up the fragments. So-long!"

And the irrepressible Dodger hastened away.

If he could have been in several places at once he would have gone first of all to Azro Harker's office, to see if chance would not play into his hands, there, but this, together with the necessity of transforming himself into Will Archer, would consume too much valuable time.

Instead, he laid out a plan which included a call on Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, a call on Helen Eastman, and a reconnaissance around the place where lived Dan Monks, the helper of Azro Harker, whom Dodger suspected of being the abductor.

When he saw Dave Doyle and explained what he thought proper he was surprised to see what a commotion he caused in that person's mind. Dave confessed that it was he who had planned to have the dock dragged for the bodies of the supposed victims of the schooner disaster; but, hearing with pleasure that they were alive, he was eager to give his aid.

"We will have Leslie back, or overturn all New York!" he declared.

"Interested in the kid, ain't ye, mister?"

"Well, yes; in a general way."

"Should say so. You're a queer one, David. Ain't got ready ter let me inter yer secret yet, hev ye?"

"I tell you I am a man dead and buried!" Dave Doyle gloomily replied.

"Rest in peace, poor soul! So you met me nigh Dan Monks's?"

"Yes."

"Good! Now I'm off ter see Helen. Any message ter her?"

"No."

"All right; but when I git ter be a dashin' young man like you—"

"Young?"

"You look forty-five, but I mistrust you. Let it pass, though. I'm off! So-long!"

Once more Billy made quick time. Reaching Helen's present home he again told his story rapidly. He was resolved that all of his allies should know the facts. Helen listened attentively, but in silence, until he chanced to mention the name of Harker's agent. Then she quickly interrupted:

"Dan Monks? Why, I know of him!"

"What of him?"

"You remember the Miss Peters who came to the pier with me, the morning after the schooner was burned? He was once her servant, but was discharged for negligence, impertinence, and suspicion of dishonesty. I heard he was helping some detective, and, of course, it is the same man. I am not sure but I can help you in this matter."

"How?"

"Dan Monks once thought well of me. I sent him money when his child was ill—I had more money then than now; and he was really grateful. He always was eager to oblige me when he saw me at Miss Peters's. I don't believe he has lost that gratitude. I will go and see him!"

"Ef you would, miss—"

"I will!"

Helen threw on her outer garments, and was ready to leave the house. A cab was engaged, and they made haste to reach Dan's. Billy was reluctant to let Dan, or any of the gang, see him arrayed with the opposition, but he was determined not to let Helen face possible danger alone.

It might be the best of good luck to Simon Beebe for her to walk into the house. Perhaps he would be there, and not allow her to come out.

"Where she goes, I go," thought the Double Detective. "She's a good one, and I'll stand by her."

Dan Monks's residence was close to the North River. From its windows could be seen a line of teams dragging along an unclean street; then a row of piers; then the grand old river that New Yorkers love so well. From its broad bosom almost always came a cool breeze which was very grateful in warm weather.

The cab paused at the door of the house; the driver was directed to wait for them, and Billy rung the bell. A dull-faced colored girl opened the door.

"Is D. Monks in?" the Dodger asked, promptly.

"Yeup," she returned, mechanically.

"We want ter see him."

"Yeup."

"Wal, let us in, an' we'll do it."

"Yeup."

Evidently the girl was not one in whose temple of understanding Genius made a home, but she stepped aside and gave them a chance to enter. It was not until Helen plainly stated that they wanted to see Dan in the parlor that she made any decisive move. Then she locked the door, put the key in her pocket and led the way up the stairs.

It was an unusual place for the parlor to be situated, but they followed without comment and were ushered into a rear room.

"I'll go for 'im," the colored girl said, and left the callers the only occupants of the apartment.

It was a double room. There were folding-doors at the point of connection, draped with a curtain. While Helen and Billy sat in what patience they could assume, this curtain was pushed aside and a boy's head appeared in the opening; a head with a sad, tear-stained, wishful face, and big, inquiring eyes.

Billy saw, and his own eyes grew larger.

"Harlem fleas!" he ejaculated.

Quick as a flash came a change to the tear-stained face, and its owner darted past the curtains and to Billy's side.

"Oh! I'm so glad to see you!" he cried.

"Won't you take me away? Oh, do, do!"

"Be calm, my youthful friend!" the Dodger directed. "I'm here fer that very purpose; me an' this charmin' young lady; an' when we settle down ter biz, things has got ter start. Say, Leslie, who brought you here?"

"A man! He stole me from the house, and took me all the way in a cab."

"Feller with a black mustache big enough fer the mane of a hoss?"

"Yes."

"That's Dan Monks. But, see here, Miss Helen, d'ye s'pose we could slide out afore Dan comes? True, the slow-witted gal locked the door, but—"

"I think we had better stay and face Monks."

"All right; I'll git inter the shadders a bit, an' let you talk with him. Mister Rawlins, stan' by her!"

The Dodger pushed Leslie over by Helen and himself moved back a little. He was just in time. The door opened, and Dan Monks walked in.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INVADERS GET INTO TROUBLE.

DAN MONKS entered with an uneasy expression on his face. In point of fact the servant had erred grievously, from his point of view, in letting strangers into the house at this time. Leslie Rawlins was where he could communicate with them, if he chanced to enter the room, and though Monks did not know who they were, or what errand had brought them there, it was an alarming state of affairs.

When he entered and saw the abducted boy already with the callers his worst fears were proved well-founded.

While there was nothing in Monks's appearance to tell positively whether he was saint or sinner, he had a stern and rather fierce expression, and his big, black brows contracted.

Addressing Leslie, he sharply ordered:

"Go into the next room!"

Miss Eastman retained her hold on the boy's hand, and quietly returned:

"Don't you know me, Mr. Monks?"

His expression changed quickly.

"What! is it you, Miss Eastman?"

"Yes."

"I did not expect to see you."

"I hope I am not unwelcome?"

"No; of course not. That is—"

His gaze strayed to her hand. It held Leslie's and the boy nestled up to her as a protector in whom lay his only hope outside of Billy Blue Blazes.

"I trust you and your family are well, Mr. Monks?" Helen pursued in an even voice.

The man started.

"Yes, yes; we are."

"And your child? I've always had a good deal of interest in her since she was sick."

Dan Monks moved uneasily. He always had believed the child would have died in its illness had it not been for Miss Eastman's aid, and he was in an unenviable position now. She had saved his child. Did she know he had abducted the child now with her?

"My girl is well," he responded, looking down; then he suddenly raised his gaze to Leslie's face and added: "Boy, go into the next room and—and play."

"Excuse me," interrupted Helen, "but please let Leslie stay with me. I am here on his account."

"You are?" ejaculated Monks.

"Yes. His mother is a friend of mine, and I would like to take the child back to her."

Monks put his hand to his head in a bewildered way. He was an unscrupulous man, but all sense of honor and shame was not lost to him. All the gratitude he was capable of feeling had been given to the young lady who had helped his sick child, and, above all other persons, he wished that lady to think well of him.

Nothing but that would have made him waver, for he had not felt any stings of conscience because he had stolen Leslie. Finally he found words to answer:

"It don't rest with me, miss."

"You are the one who took the boy away from his mother."

"How do you know that?"

"I am well aware of it. Mr. Monks, I did not think this of you. For the sake of your own child I should think you would be thoughtful of others'. I cannot believe, however, that you realize the extent of what you have done. You are not an unjust or criminal man"—the speaker was not so sure of that as she pretended—"and I feel that I have only to present the matter in its true light to have you consent to let Leslie go."

"But it don't rest with me."

"With whom, then?"

Monks did not reply, and Helen added:

"I understand; with Azro Harker, your superior, and Captain Simon Beebe. But, surely, you would not let them lead you into dishonorable work?"

"Miss, don't you see I have nothing to do about it? They are the bosses; I'm only a servant."

"I understand all that, but you now have matters in your own hands. Servant though you may be, you need not be party to wrong. Better break with them than lose your self-respect. Look at this child! He has been violently parted from his mother. Remember when your child was ill. Would you harm another's child? Yes; and remember that, when your child recovered, you said if I ever wanted any help you would do all in your power for me. The time has come. Let me take this boy away!"

Helen had spoken well. Not only had her manner been kind and persuasive, but she had appealed to Dan's one vulnerable point.

She had not appealed in vain, for he was moved, but the victory was not yet won.

"Ask anything else!" he exclaimed.

"But I desire only one thing."

"I can't grant that! I can't; don't ask me. This is a matter too deep for me to meddle with. There is law at work, and prospect of law-suits, and I can't meddle. If you want to talk with any one, go to my bosses."

Billy Blue Blazes calmly rose.

"Mister," quoth the Double Detective, "who we'll go to will be the copper on the nearest corner!"

Monks regarded the speaker disdainfully.

"Who are you?"

"I'm a twin brother of Inspector Byrnes, or I may be him. One of us was stole from the cradle while an infant, an' twa'n't never known which. I may be the inspector, an' he may be me. Anyhow, ef you don't let this youthful kid go with us, I'll slide out an' tell a gaval!"

"A good deal of attention he would pay to a rag-bag like you!" Monks sneered.

"His attention would be given ter you! Harlem fleas! do you think sech things are allowed in our glorious city? Not much, b' mighty!"

Billy threw out his arm in a gesture expressive of more than words could convey, but its force was lost when, most inopportunistly, another person walked into the room.

It was Captain Beebe!

He paused and looked fixedly at Billy, and a more angry countenance the Dodger never had seen. Simon was not in weeping mood, then, but looked quite as dangerous as his own words now demonstrated.

"You vile traitor!" he cried, "what are you doing here?"

"Ef! W'ot's that?" Billy replied, as composedly as was possible after such a shock.

"I think I see now why some of our plans have miscarried. You have been a traitor and spy from the first. You young hound! I'll wring your neck for you!"

"Don't think of it!" was the cool retort.

"You would come ter grief as sure as Daniel Webster. Git up a more peaceful amusement. Git a bicycle, an' j'ine the boys in ridin' over the new pavement on Eighth avenue."

"I see," pursued the captain, with growing passion, "that you've been a snake in the grass! Why didn't I suspect it before? But I have you now, and I'll fix you, you vile traitor. Monks, seize that scoundrel, and we'll tie a stone to him and drop him in the river. Go on!"

"I don't know about it," returned Dan, looking at Helen, ashamed to act, yet willing to aid Beebe.

"Are you afraid of a boy? See here!"

The captain drew a revolver viciously and turned it on Billy.

"Now, man," he added, "overpower the traitor!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DODGER HAS TO FIGHT.

BILLY BLUE BLAZES stood firm and defiant. "I advise you not to try it, mister," he returned, coolly. "Put up that shootin'-iron. Ef you don't want ter go up-country and be electrocuted, you won't p'int that gun this way. As fer scarin' me, you can't; I ain't built right."

"Monks, will you obey me?" Beebe demanded, turning to his assistant.

"I'm with you," Monks replied, "but I'd like to see this settled up peaceably. Of course we won't give up the small boy, but this big one—has he been with you?"

"Yes, and sold me out," the captain explained, bitterly. "The fellow has pretended to be my faithful helper. But I now think I see where all the malign influences at work against me come from. He is a sneak, a spy and a traitor."

"Take it easy, general," Billy advised. "Whatever I may hev done, you can't growl. You picked me up on the streets and hired me. Ef I ain't served you wal, I reckon you can't match no black record with a white."

"Do you admit you have worked against me?"

"I admit nothin'."

"It is enough that you are nere with her!"

He turned to Helen, and glared upon her. He was going fast along the road of crime. His schemes had not worked well, but he had been reluctant to give up, and repeated plots and failures had put him in a wild and feverish state.

"I see you are here!" he added.

"Yes, Captain Beebe," Helen calmly replied.

"I have come for Leslie."

"You can't have him!" Simon shouted.

"I am going to take him out of this house with me!"

"You are. —y the fiends, you don't know what you are talking about. Do you know that Monks and I are here? Do you think you can overcome us? Do you think I have schemed so much, only to be baffled now by such a weak opposition as this? Why, I would burn the house down over our heads, with all in it, before I would yield."

"But such a step is not necessary. Monks and I are quite able to care for you. The only result of your visit here is that you and the young traitor there are added to the list of my prisoners!"

"Harlem fleas!" Billy exclaimed, "don't go on in sech a voylent way. Why, general, we hev allies outside, watchin' the house, an' ef we don't show up soon, they'll march in ter know the cause."

"I don't believe it!"

"All right."

"It may be true," Monks observed, uneasily.

"It is true."

"The boy is lying; he's the greatest liar in New York!" Beebe declared, viciously.

"Wait till the perleece git you. Why, you are only givin' yerself a dig in the back by holdin' off like this. It'll be all the worse fer you, an' you'll hev only yerself ter thank. All right; we ain't kickin'."

Dan pulled at Beebe's sleeve and whispered to him.

"Mr. Monks," spoke Helen, gravely, "the time has come for you to show your gratitude for what happened when your child was ill."

There was no reply, but the men went aside and talked in low tones, for some time. It was evident that there was no conflict of opinion, which showed that Dan was going to turn against Miss Eastman. Billy improved the chance to speak with her, and told her that Dave Doyle was outside on the watch. If they did not return soon he certainly would take steps to help them.

Simon and Monks came back, and the latter at once walked up to Billy.

"You are to be tied up," he announced, "and you may as well take it coolly."

"Hands off!" the Dodger retorted. "I won't yield an inch, an' ef you—"

The unspoken warning was not heeded. Dan made a rush to seize his prey, but Billy struck out and gave him a blow on the nose that made him reel.

"Make fer the door!" the fearless detective exclaimed. "I'll take care of them!"

It was a big contract, as he speedily found. Both men leaped at him, and a scene of the greatest excitement followed. He struck out manfully and gave them several hard blows, but the odds were too much for him. They finally succeeded in throwing him down, and Monks sat on him and held his hands.

"Bring ropes!" he directed. "We will tie the cub up."

Billy accepted the situation with his usual nonchalance, and had nothing to regret. He had at no time expected to overcome both of them, but the diversion had worked as he hoped; Helen and Leslie had fled from the room.

The Dodger would have been content had not the coolness of his captors indicated that they had no fear of the others being able to escape.

The binding was soon done, as material was at hand, and the men pronounced him helpless.

"What can we do now?" Beebe asked, anxiously. "If the police come in, it will go hard with us if he is found here."

"I'll fix that, or, at least, as well as I can. Follow me, and I'll stow him away where only a close search will bring him to light."

He picked Billy up bodily, carried him to the hall, and then up another flight of stairs. The Dodger tried to get a view of the lower hall, to

see if Helen was visible, but did not succeed. He was conveyed to an unfinished part of the attic. A rough partition had made one-half of it into a store-room, and a good deal of semi-useless matter was scattered around, several boxes being among the rest.

Monks moved some of these boxes, making a recess, and into this the prisoner was put.

When the boxes were replaced he was in a place where he could see nothing and hear but little more. His hands and feet were bound, and a cloth tied around his mouth prevented him from speaking.

For some time he lay perfectly still, but this was only because he was not sure they had left the garret. Finally he decided they had, and his eccentric mind shaped words his tongue could not utter:

"Mister Blue Blazes, you've got ter the end o' yer halter. You ain't in it, an' you're out o' light. Shut up like a turkey in a coop, an' no chance ter gobble. All comes o' your meddlin' with things that don't concern you, too. You've got an idee you're a detective, but nobody else ever discovered it. Who ever heard of Vidocq bein' sealed up by dry goods cases? William B. Blazes, you're calped, an' the red-men are hev'in' their little dance around the pole on which hangs yer red tresses. They think you a fool; they think you done up. Query: Be you?"

He turned upon his side.

"Ef so, you're badly took in."

He began to wrestle with his bonds.

When these impediments were being adjusted he had done his best to deceive Monks. Possessing large wrists and small hands he had endeavored to take up all possible room with the former, in order that the cords might not press so tightly as they were supposed to press.

He believed he had succeeded, and was about to test the matter.

Vigorously he tried to draw his hands out.

For awhile it seemed a hopeless task, and he felt as if the flesh was being torn away in the attempt, but he was rewarded at last. One hand slipped out, and the job was done.

It was only a short task to free the other hand and, later, to remove the bandage around his mouth; and then he untied the cords on his ankles. He was free after one of the shortest experiences in bonds on record.

"Mister Blazes, shake hands!" he exclaimed.

"You may be more of a detective than you were lately represented. Now, fer action!"

He sprang to his feet, and crawled cautiously upon the box. When satisfied that his enemies really had left the garret, he fully left the recess, dusty, covered with cobwebs, but triumphant.

He went to the head of the stairs and looked down. All was quiet there, but he was unable to tell the state of affairs. He was bold enough to venture down, but doubted the wisdom of rashness.

If captured again he would not be likely to get out of it so well.

After a little meditation he sought for and found a skylight, and ascended to the flat roof. He had hoped to see Dave Doyle on guard, and being able to signal to him, but the Nova Scotian had disappeared. Then he looked for a policeman, but saw none.

"Wonder of there is a water-pipe, or any contrivance I kin slide down? I'll see!"

He peered over the roof at the front of the house, and at once became witness to an exciting scene. There was a fire-escape, and upon one of the balconies two men were struggling together desperately, each trying, it seemed, to throw the other off into the street.

"Harlem fleas!" Billy cried, "it's Monks and Dave Doyle!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BILLY GETS A FRESH ENGAGEMENT.

It was a surprising and startling discovery. Billy had not had the least idea that Dave Doyle was in the house, and did not, even then, understand how he had gained access there.

But the facts were not to be disputed, and the ugliest of all was that if either man was thrown to the irregular, but hard, sidewalk below it would be a serious, perhaps a fatal matter.

"B'jinks! I'm in that rustle!" Billy exclaimed.

The fire-escape did not reach to the roof, but was near enough to furnish a plan. The Dodger dropped to the upper balcony, skillfully avoided a fall, and then hastened down the ladder. Neither man saw him, and he uttered no cry.

The fighting pair had reached the crisis. Small as the balcony was, and inadequately guarded with railing, no two strong men could long struggle there. Both had partially fallen, and,

hanging over the rail, neared a point which threatened to send both down.

"I have you!" Monks cried.

He gave his adversary another push, and Dave Doyle grasped at the rail only to miss it. He hung suspended in air, and unable to recover; he slipped; he was falling!

Then a strong hand grasped his collar and pulled him back.

"Gent," quoth the Dodger, coolly, "you want ter let up on this kind of a shindy!"

Dan Monks gazed at the figure above him, and was stupefied with surprise.

"David," the Double Detective added, "my advice is that you get a wiggle on!"

Then the speaker swung himself into the house through the open window, and the Nova Scotian was not slow to follow. Quickly Billy closed and fastened the window.

"Daniel will hev ter break the glass ter get in," he added.

"Helen!" Doyle exclaimed. "Where is she?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Ain't she gone out?"

"No."

"Then she must be here still. Guess they've got her in durance vile. My frien', a mouse shouldn't try ter swaller a mountain. Le's go fer the perleece, an' let them take charge. Wait! here's a subjack!"

He darted into the hall and caught the colored servant, who was passing.

"Desdemona!" he cried, "where's the other prisoners? Speak up, now, like a little man!"

"Deed, sah, I don't know," the girl answered.

"Where's Simon Beebe?"

"Gone out, sah."

"Glad you've told one truth, but the other statement has hooked teeth all up its back. Et don't go. Lead the way ter them folks, ter wit: The young lady an' the boy."

"But I doan' know—"

"Say that ag'in, an' I'll call in a perleecceman. He will arrest you, an' you'll be locked up in the Tombs—"

"Deed, sah, I doan' wanten be; I ain't dead, an' don't want ter go ter no tomb. I told 'em I wouldn't let on, but I'll show you where they be."

If the servant was confused in her statements, it was only a companion picture to the condition of her mind. She imagined that the fierce young man in the rough, dust-covered suit had threatened to put her in a "tomb," and this took all of the courage out of her. She was in such haste to lead the way that they almost had to run to keep up with her.

She hurriedly unlocked the cellar door.

"Dat yah is de place!" she announced.

"Go carefully," Dave Doyle advised. "It may be another trap."

"We'll see. Hullo, down there! Any need fer an ambulance ter cart yer off ter Bellevue?"

He was answered at once, and Helen and Leslie made their appearance. They were not bound; the cellar had been considered strong enough to keep them in bounds.

Dan Monks did not put in an appearance, but the value of prompt action was apparent to all. They acted according to their convictions. Hurriedly unlocking the street door, they passed out.

Still Monks was invisible, but as the window was not broken, it was plain that he had taken chances and dropped to the sidewalk. A policeman was sauntering along the street, but, oddly enough, the affair on the fire-escape had not attracted the attention of any one who had been nearer at hand.

Satisfied with the outcome of affairs, the rescuers and Leslie hastened toward the cab, the driver of which was sleeping on the box.

"Now, wot's ter be done with this small boy?" Billy inquired. "Old King Coal's ain't no place fer him nor his maternal ancestor, an' both ought ter be got away ter some other place."

"I'll take Leslie with me," Helen returned.

"I want to go to my mother!" cried the boy, in alarm.

Helen tried to quiet him, but he proved stubborn, and it was agreed that they should take him back to Mrs. Rawlins. It was Miss Eastman and Billy who settled this point, for no word came from Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, and when they turned to look for him, he was gone.

"Harlem fleas! but ain't he a queer duck?" the Dodger muttered.

Helen said nothing, but her face had an odd expression.

"Kin you understand him, maiss?"

"You know I've seen Mr. Doyle only casually."

"He says he is a man dead and buried!"

She drew a deep sigh, but seeing Billy's gaze fixed inquisitively on her face, abruptly turned to the cab.

"Let us go at once," she requested.

They were soon proceeding southward, and were not long in restoring Leslie to his mother. Great was the joy in the house thereat, and the non-combatants did a good deal of weeping. Billy remained practical, and advised a prompt shifting of base, but Mrs. Rawlins expressed a wish to stay where she was, and Old King Coal backed her up.

"A good idee," he said. "We kin put enough men in here ter make her an' the kid safe, an' ef they try ter get at 'em ag'in, our guards kin seize the intruders. See?"

"I don't reckon they'll try it," Billy replied. "Hev an idee the enemy will be glad ter go on the defensive, now, an' do the crawfish. But it ain't sure, an' I'd advise a shift. Still, I ain't boss o' nobody but myself; do as you please. I've got biz!"

He left them to settle their own affairs and hurried to his private room. There he proceeded to transform himself into Will Archer.

"Billy Blue Blazes has lost his grip as a double-faced youth," he murmured, as he put Billy's clothes away. "Simon has accused Billy of being a traitor. But Will remains in good repute, as far as I know, and I will see if any more fish will come to my net. Harlem fleas! yes!"

He left the house and walked over to Azro Harker's office.

No one was there.

Entering, he sat down and tried to kill time, but it was no easy work. Where was Harker? Where, Beebe? Where, Monks? Where, Ducky Meegan? He was about to give it up when footsteps sounded and Captain Simon entered.

The mariner looked weary and dejected, and his eyes had an uneasy, furtive roll, as if he expected to see an enemy appear and assail him.

"Where's Harker?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," Will politely replied.

"I want to see him at once."

"Perhaps he is at his house."

"No; I've been there."

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Is there? Well, I should say so; everything is wrong. My luck has all gone back on me. I am the most unfortunate and persecuted man living. I never have done harm to any one, yet evil-minded persons turn upon me like wolves, and rend my heart. An honest man has no show in this world; honesty only makes enemies!"

Before this speech was finished the mariner was weeping freely, and he heaved one of his old thunder-like sighs.

"You don't know how I feel for you, sir," observed the Double Detective, sympathetically.

"Of course; you are Mr. Harker's man, and you ought to. But there are some awful wicked folks in this world!"

"I am aware of it, captain."

"By the way, are you acquainted around this part of the city?"

"Considerably, sir."

"Do you know a boy called Billy Blue Blazes?"

The Dodger did not show any emotion.

"I think I've heard of him. Let me see—what is his business?"

"Sneaking, and spying into other people's business!"

"What has he done?"

"He's done that, so I want him put out of sight. I have hated folks before now, but never any one as I do him. He is full of mischief and ingenuity, and always turns up just when not wanted. Now, I'll give you twenty dollars to hunt that demon down, and get him into some muss with the police, so he'll be arrested!"

"That's a tempting offer, and I'll look for him," Will gravely replied. "How does he look? How old is he?"

"Nineteen, perhaps."

"About my size?"

"Bless me, no! He's twenty-five pounds heavier, but not so tall. He's pretty much all breadth, but as nimble as an eel."

"How does he look in the face?"

"Homely as sin! Coarse-featured and freckled. Has a squint in one eye, at times. Talks as fast as a race-horse. Full of words and cheek. Regular hoodlum!"

"I'll look the scoundrel up, sir," the Double Detective promised. "Once let me get my hands on him and I'll do him up."

"Don't try that," Beebe cautioned. "He's so much larger than you that he would be too

much for you. You are a gentleman, while he is a tough. But get a hold on him so the police can seize him, and the twenty dollars is yours."

"I'll hunt the fellow down!" was the emphatic response.

CHAPTER XV.

AWAITING THE ATTACK.

FOOTSTEPS sounded in the hall, and Azro Harker and Ducky Meegan entered. The latter was as jaunty and confident as ever, but Azro looked quite as worried and unhappy as Captain Beebe did. He sat down heavily.

"What news?" Simon asked.

"None!"

"Have you seen any of the opposition?"

Azro glanced doubtfully at Will Archer.

"You can trust him," Simon remarked, with confidence. "I have had a talk with him, and he is going to help me particularly in the future. Will is all right!"

"I guess that is so," Harker agreed; "he always has been faithful to me. You understand, Will, that when detectives get after criminals, the latter are bold and defiant, and strike back at us in all possible ways. As a result, we have to match trick with trick, and if we sometimes seem severe, it is only that our lives, our reputations and the majesty of the law have to be guarded."

"Dat's jest it," declared Ducky, with much unction.

Will also stated that he realized all these things, and the conspirators began to talk freely, though they hung to the claim that they were on the side of justice.

Harker's troubled manner was something new to Will. The latter had before then gained vague knowledge of sundry sharp practices on the part of his employer, but there had never been anything to show that he was unscrupulous. He had always made the claim that these practices were necessary in "the cause of justice," and Will had believed him. Now he knew different. Harker was dishonest and unscrupulous, and a disgrace to his calling. But now, too, he had got into deep waters by his advocacy of Beebe's crooked cause, and ruin menaced him.

When this preliminary conversation was over, he abruptly said:

"I have planned another bold move."

"Good!" Simon commented.

"The woman and her child must be got out of sight."

"Well said, but how is it to be done?"

"A sail-boat must be used to take them from New York to a point on the Jersey Coast, where they can be held prisoners. The main trouble will be to get them to the boat, but I have that arranged, or, at least, planned. They are back at old Jones's house. Now, the building next to that is a tumble-down old concern that is not occupied just now. My plan is this: We will hire it, get possession at once, and, to-night, make a hole through the connecting wall and get at our prey."

"Can it be done?" Beebe asked, eagerly.

"Why not?"

"Perhaps it can."

"Of course it can. Will they expect such a move? Hardly! Of course we shall not tell the agent of the second house that we propose to occupy at once; we simply hire the house and take the key. Crowbars, spikes, etc., will enable us to drill the wall. Doubtless, the cellar will be our objective point."

"It's a bold plan," Simon murmured.

"Nothing else will answer."

"But if your idea, as advanced to me early to-day, that they dare not go to the police, is correct, will they not be just as timid about calling for help in the future?"

"The chief trouble is that the pier spy, that Billy Blue Blazes, will go to the police. He has no secret to hide—his nature is as open as his gall—and it would be just like him to go to Police Headquarters and call for help."

"I never was so deceived in any man in my life," put in Ducky Meegan, mournfully. "Dat kid seemed to be built jes' about right, an' I thought he was a good one, but he's gone dead back on us. I disown sech a pal. I like white men. See?"

If Ducky had been as fertile in resources as Captain Beebe, he would probably have dropped a few tears at this juncture, for his feelings were grievously lacerated.

After some further talk Will and Meegan were sent to hire the building next to Old King Coal's, Beebe giving the former money to pay for a month's rent.

It had been delicately hinted that perhaps

Ducky ought not to enter the real estate office, so he remained on a corner, two blocks away, while Will went to do the business.

The latter was getting a good deal of satisfaction out of his part in the drama. He was fooling the conspirators in the best of shape, even if Billy Blue Blazes had lost their confidence.

Entering the office, he proceeded to negotiate for the house, and succeeded so well that the key was given to him as soon as he produced the money. The house was old, and the agent was not disposed to be finical. A tenant who could pay his rent was just as satisfactory without references as if he had a yard of them.

Will returned to Ducky, and found that person leaning against a building in a dejected attitude.

"I'm back, Mr. Meegan!"

Mr. Meegan turned slowly, and Will saw that one of his cheeks was marked with several red lines, from which a little blood had oozed out. These lines did not add to Ducky's beauty, and he appeared to realize the fact.

"Hallo! have you encountered a wildcat?" the Double Detective demanded.

"I wuz walkin' by a store on Greenwich street, where dey sold farmin' tools," explained the tough, in detail, "an' I run ag'inst de teeth of a garden-rake dat was hangin' up dere. See?"

"That's bad."

"Et's a howlin' shame."

"What will you do—"

"Do! I se goin' ter break his head. See?"

"Whose head?"

"Eh? Oh! Wal, you see, it wasn't a rake. Fack is, I met an old enemy; a darky named Wash Calhoun; an' I pitched inter him, ter do him up. See? I'd hev done it, too, but me foot slipped on an orange-peel, an' de black stuff jes' got me head in chancery an' clawed me. See? But," Ducky candidly added, "ef it hadn't been fer dat orange-peel I'd 'a' broke his jaw. Dat I would!"

Will avoided an impulse to smile, and flattered the speaker's vanity with a few well-chosen words which had due effect.

"Guess you's quite a feller," Ducky observed, "ef you's do dress like a dude, an' hev a waist like a swell. De only thing I hev ag'inst you is dat you look a bit like dat Billy Blue Blazes who went back on me."

"I do? How?"

"Can't jes' say. He was as big as two o' you, an' he had a dark, freckled face, an' a squint in one eye, but you ain't got none o' them things. Mebbe it's all fancy, though, dat there is any likeness."

The careless way in which Ducky spoke showed that he had no real suspicions, and Will grew easier. They returned to Harker's office, and the key was handed over.

Then the conspirators perfected their plans for the night, which, however, included nothing new. Will was not asked to join them, nor did he request it. When they began to break the wall, he wanted to be on the other side.

He was soon at liberty, and he did not fail to move promptly. He went back to Old King Coal's, slipped quietly into his Billy Blue Blazes character, and had a long talk with the household, there.

It was agreed that they should remain where they were, but have a force capable of receiving the wall-breakers properly.

The Dodger decided that one of this force must be Dave Doyle, of Nova Scotia, and he went to see that person, laid the new plot before him, and added:

"Now, David, kin we hev you fer one o' our soldiers?"

The Nova Scotian hesitated.

"I should like to help you, but—"

"What?"

"I dislike the publicity."

"Harlem fleas! ain't et late in life fer you ter be bashful, mister!"

Doyle meditated, and finally answered:

"I will go on condition that when I get there I may be allowed to sink into oblivion, and neither speak nor be spoken to."

"Mister, ef it'll oblige you the whole lot on us will wear gags, an' never raise our bazoo. I want you at any price; luxuries come high, but we must hev them. David, I live in hopes you'll ante up an' reform from bein' a walkin' mystery, pretty soon."

"I tell you I am a man dead and buried."

"You look ghostly, I allow; should imagine you was a mere spook ef you hadn't give Dan Monks, an' others, sech a right smart hustle. But let it pass; I'd rather deal with spooks than a spook priestess. Et don't cost so much, ez New Yorkers know, ginerally."

Dave Doyle agreed to be at Old King Coal's

at an early hour, and Billy then went in search of other recruits.

The result of his planning was that, at dark, six persons were gathered in the Jones house who were capable of energetic action, and ought to be able to defeat the enemy. They were Billy, Dave Doyle, Wash Calhoun, and three stout 'longshoremen whom Billy knew well. That Beebe's party could conquer this force no one believed.

Mrs. Rawlins and her boy, and Old King Coal and his wife, were present as non-combatants, or were supposed to be such; but the old man talked war in his cracked voice, and his wife built a hot fire and put as much water to boil as she could manage. She did this without explanation, but her lips closed tightly, and she vowed to herself that if war came she would find a way to make herself useful.

A period of waiting followed.

The 'longshoremen were in high spirits, and joked with the Dodger according to their custom.

Dave Doyle maintained his old reputation and kept well in the rear. He did not show any fear of those already present, but when either Jones or his wife came into the basement he looked up in a half-startled way.

Was he afraid Mrs. Rawlins would appear?

Billy decided that Dave Doyle was the most mysterious man he ever had seen.

At nine o'clock the rival force began to gather, and entered the other house. Beebe, Ducky Meegan, Harker and another man were seen to pass in. They bore packages which, it was inferred, contained the tools for breaking the wall.

At eleven the first demonstration was detected. As Billy sat with his head against the wall he faintly heard that which interested him.

"They're pryin' out the bricks!" he exclaimed. "Harlem fleas! but won't there be a pile o' fun when they break through!"

CHAPTER XVI.

FIGHTING THE FOE.

THE defenders waited with more or less anxiety for the breach to be made in the wall. Billy Blue Blazes was determined that this should be the last effort of the enemy. They were too dangerous, too desperately in earnest to be allowed further chance to do harm; and he hoped to capture the whole party and turn them over to the police.

This would bring about revelations in the Beebe-Eastman case which all the parties most concerned seemed desirous of avoiding, but, as they had not seen fit to be definite in their explanations, it was well to let the law settle it.

He believed some sentimental considerations entered into the general reserve.

Beebe's party worked steadily at the other side of the wall, but without making any betraying sound. Now and then the patrolman on that beat passed by, but he heard nothing.

It would have been the same in Old King Coal's house if they had obtained no warning.

Nearer and nearer came the workmen; clearer and clearer became the sounds. The defenders ceased conversation, except in whispers. Billy turned the gas down, leaving only a tiny spot of fire, but Old King Coal was stationed by the fixture, ready to turn it up suddenly when he received the order from Billy, whom all recognized as leader.

The 'longshoremen, rough but true, were well armed and eager for a fight.

Billy passed the word of caution to his men.

"Don't sound another warble! They've got 'most through, an' a small thing will scare them off. Stan' by yer guns, an' remember the heroes of American hist'ry. Let the Star Spangled Banner float high, an' all rascals be laid low. Them is my sentiments. You kin think them right along, but don't speak them till the war is over!"

A little mortar rattled down on their side of the wall.

They relapsed into silence.

The critical moment was at hand!

A lull followed, the unseen workmen evidently wishing to see if any alarm ensued, but they soon resumed. Their voices became audible. Light shone through the wall. A brick dropped heavily.

After that they made but little noise. The other bricks were grasped and drawn back, so that none could drop, and the work of enlarging the breach went on rapidly. The light thus admitted grew stronger, but not sufficiently so to reveal the defenders.

Cautious whispers were distinctly heard.

"I can go through now."

"Make it a little larger. We want a way of retreat."

"Can't we come back as well as go in?"

"We may return in haste."

"But victorious, you bet! Well, here's another brick. Later, I'll hand the humans back ter you."

Larger grew the aperture, and further work was abandoned. A man crawled through. Others followed.

The defenders hardly ventured to breathe.

"Victory is ours!" declared a deep voice.

"Light!" cried Billy.

Up flashed the gas.

A tableau followed which was was impressive to all parties, and startling to one-half of them. There stood the house-breakers with Simon Beebe and Ducky Meegan at their head. Harker was half-way through the aperture, and the paid tools, between him and Beebe.

"Murder!" one of the intruders exclaimed, in dismay.

The eager 'longshoremen sprung upon the gang.

No one was able to give a clear account of what followed. Billy struck at one of the newcomers, and all were mixed up in the general mêlée. It was give and take, then, and the Dodger was not sure in which line he excelled. Afterward, only one picture was distinct in his mind.

He saw Mrs. Old King Coal, tall, bony and stern, with a dipper of steaming water; he saw her throw it; he saw one of the men dodge, and then yell and make a plunge for the hole in the wall.

It was Mr. Ducky Meegan, and he had come to grief again.

If the belligerent hostess threw any more hot water it did not hurt any one. The 'longshoremen were remarkable men in a fight, and the advantage they had been gaining gradually, now became decisive.

What were left of the intruders surrendered.

Examination, however, showed that Meegan and Azro Harker had escaped.

The 'longshoremen bound the prisoners, and tied knots not likely to be baffled. It was a most decisive triumph, as far as it went, but lacked something of being complete. The escape of two of the party was not to Billy's liking, but the fact that the arch enemy of the Rawlins family was secured was very satisfactory.

Beebe, however, would do no talking.

After a discussion it was decided to hold the prisoners until morning, so Billy again became Will Archer and went out to reconnoiter. He went to Azro Harker's office, but it was silent and deserted.

Just as he was about to give it up and go home a figure stealthily approached, evidently anxious to avoid both the patrolmen and any envoys of more direct enemies. Will recognized Ducky Meegan and made haste to join him.

"Well, old man, how goes it?" he asked bluffly.

The tough took the speaker's arm and, in mysterious silence, led him to a street-lamp. Turning one cheek toward the light he said, in a melancholy voice:

"Look at that!"

The Dodger looked. A blister had risen on the tough's cheek to the size of a silver dollar. It was the work of the hot water thrown by Mrs. John Jones. Only for Ducky's skill in dodging the damage would have been much greater, but only a very small amount had touched him. What reached the mark, however, had done execution.

"Ain't I holy show?" Mr. Meegan asked, mournfully.

Certainly, he was not handsome. The eye discolored by Wash Calhoun had not yet assumed a normal color; the bruise made on Ducky's nose by Dave Doyle remained; one cheek had been artistically striped by Wash's finger-nails; and now the other cheek looked like an adder puffed up for business.

"Me uncle was blowed up in a Mississippi steamboat," the victim added, "an' it killed him dead, but I make bold ter say he wa'n't half so much mutilated as I be. Me heart is broke! No more shall I be de pride ave de girruls along de old North River, fer dey would not be after speakin' wid sech a wreck. See? I think I shall go an' den up somewhere, where the eye of man sees not, till me primeval beauty returns. Boy, excuse me ef me words are few. Me heart is broke! Farewell!"

With the old, tragic gesture, Mr. Meegan turned and walked away, and Billy let him go.

He imagined it would be easier to locate Harker with the turbulent, headlong rough at liberty, also.

Shortly after, the Dodger returned to Old King Coal's. That person was waiting to see him.

"Billy, Mrs. Rawlins has been a-askin' of my advice."

"W'ot about?"

"She's got her courage up, now her brother is nabbed, an' has told me w'ot the racket is. She asks me, 'W'ot would you do?' an' I says, 'Billy, he's wiser than me.'"

"Then you talked nonsense, Mr. John Jones; I'm only a boy. But I'm in an awful hanker ter hear her story. Will she tell it ter me?"

"That's jest w'ot she wants ter do. Go an' put on yer Billy Blue Blazes rig, an' see her."

"John, I'm changin' clothes more than a sassy belle, but here goes!"

A few minutes later he entered the widow's presence as the Dodger of the Docks, and it needed no persuasion to make her tell the story. It was as follows:

"I grew up poor, and never expected to have any money. True, I had one rich relative, a very old man named Edric Zelland, but the relationship was so distant that I never dreamed of being his heir, or one of his heirs. I supposed he had nearer relatives, though he had lived as a bachelor.

"When he died, however, I learned that I was one of the nearest of kin.

"If he had left no will I and my brother, Captain Beebe, would have heired one-half of his property. The other half would have gone to our cousin of the second degree, Helen Eastman.

"But he left a will.

"If all reports are correct, he left two wills.

"One was drawn up in favor of my brother and me, and did not mention Helen. The other was strongly in her favor, and gave Captain Beebe and me only one thousand dollars each. Thus, the courts were beset with wills, and knew not which to choose. True, the one in our favor was of the later date, but Helen's lawyer claimed that it was fraudulent, and, after a little legal skirmishing, matters were left in abeyance until missing witnesses could be found.

"Helen had some money, and, becoming disgusted over the contest she announced, but not officially, that she was going to retire from all participation, and give up all claims.

"Captain Beebe had been madly anxious to get the money, and he rejoiced at her decision, but, suddenly, she lost what money she had, and then he was sure she would fight in court for the Zelland money.

"Now, while I had rarely met Helen, or Mr. Zelland, he had once told me that he had made a will in her favor. He added that it was the only one he had ever made, or should make.

"Ever after I referred to this fact, in conversation with my brother, he was suspicious of me. I did not join him zealously in the fight; I did think Zelland intended to give Helen the money; while the charge that the second will was forged always had a partial believer in me.

"Day by day Simon grew more suspicious.

"Helen had lost her money, and, he thought, would want more.

"Was I going to turn against him?—to tell in court what Zelland had said to me?

"I believe he dwelt upon these points until he became a monomaniac. I knew he was not a good man in the past, but, surely, he was not in his right mind when he shut me up in the schooner and applied the torch.

"Edric Zelland's money has ruined one man; it remains to be seen what it will do for others!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A MYSTERY NO LONGER.

ONE revelation was made, and it was clear to the Double Detective how Simon Beebe, in his mad thirst for money, had allowed himself to go on step by step in crime.

"Ez fer Zelland's will," Billy remarked, "I should say you an' Helen would do well ter burn 'em both, an' inherit under the law."

"I would rather give up all than continue this legal battle," Mrs. Rawlins returned, with a sigh. "And I believe Helen deserves all—that is, Zelland intended her to have all."

"Who are the missin' witnesses you speak of?"

"Servants; I don't know their names. Unimportant witnesses, I think, really. There was once a man who, I think, could have told the exact truth."

"Where is he?"

"Dead and buried!" she answered, with a deep sigh.

"Who was he?"

"Allen Hamlin, my nephew. He was drowned near Staten Island. Undoubtedly he knew all about the second will—or that in favor of Captain Beebe and myself—and could have said positively whether the will was genuine or false. He was a noble young man, but death took him early."

Mrs. Rawlins rose abruptly.

"I will now retire," she added.

She went, and Billy returned to the prisoners and the guards. All of the former were taking matters calmly but Simon Beebe; he was weeping, and seemed very down-hearted. Due arrangements were made by which a guard could be kept all night, one man relieving another, while the rest could sleep, and then they prepared to get what rest they could. There was no further interruption to that rest.

It was late when they became astir in the morning, but, at last, Billy was ready to go out and notify the police when he was surprised to see Helen appear.

"Is Dave Doyle here?" she asked, abruptly.

"Yes, mum," Billy returned.

"I have been to his place of residence in vain, and thought he must be here. I want to see him!"

"You shall. Foller me! I'll pilot you to him, an' then take a sneak an' leave you alone."

"No; I want you to hear what is said."

"All right; I ain't a-kickin' on that!"

He conducted her to the parlor, and, as it happened, Dave Doyle already was there. The latter looked agitated on seeing her, but showed less of his old fancy for flight than usual. She stood in silence, and they regarded each other in that way until Billy began to wonder if they had lost the power of speech. It was she who finally broke the silence. In a voice far from calm she remarked:

"I—I have come to see you!"

"Yes?" he returned, moving nervously.

"I want to ask if—if you do not think it is time for you to speak?"

"You know me, then?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"No. The scene on the pier proved it."

He hesitated, and then rapidly added:

"Yes; the time has come for me to speak. If I had been brave before—but let it pass. I was a coward, and that's all there was to it. I fled from New York and went to Nova Scotia. There I remained until I learned that a body had been found in the bay and identified as mine. Then I decided to return."

"I had let my beard grow. Now, I colored both that and my hair, and used means to transform both, which had been perfectly straight, into crinkly, wild disorder. On my face I marked lines, after taking lessons of an actor, which made me look far older than I was. Also, in place of my fashionable attire of other days, I wore rough garments."

"Miss Eastman, you shall hear the story of the forged will. I'll tell it, and then leave your sight forever."

"You know the story of my great shame. I was bookkeeper for a business house. One night a package of money was accidentally left out of the safe. I knew it would not be missed for thirty-six hours if I took it. If I took it! Yes; for take it I did. I was race-mad, then. I imagined if I had money I could double it, increase it ten times, if I got the chance."

"You know of my shame. I took it; I risked it; I lost! Maddening fact! I went to my uncle, Simon Beebe, for help. He refused to give it. You learned of the facts and offered me money—your own."

"I refused it—you know why. My shame would have been greater to accept than to be branded a thief."

"I determined to flee. I went home and began to overhaul my papers. There I found a paper which recalled an event of the past. It was the will of Edric Zelland, but not signed. By its terms you received two-thirds of the great Zelland property, while I, my uncle and my aunt, shared equally in the remainder."

"The unsigned paper recalled a strange event."

"I remembered what I had before known, that Captain Beebe had worked hard on Zelland, after the latter had made one will—which gave you almost all of his property—to induce the old gentleman to make a second, giving more to Beebe."

"Zelland consented. He signed a second will—that which Beebe has since claimed is genuine. But it was a base fraud. I had known that Zelland was ill at night, and a man purporting to be a doctor was called in, who assured the old man he would die at once, which he did not do."

"A little quick investigation enabled me to learn that the so-called doctor was no doctor at all. Then I realized two things: First, Zelland had been made to believe he was to die by means of a drug which made him ill; secondly, a bogus will had been substituted, and palmed off upon him for the real will he had drawn up, but not signed."

"This I suspected, and his own words subsequently confirmed all I guessed at."

"Again I went to him for money, but only to be refused. He saw that one offense against law would offset the other, and had nerve enough to try and bluff me. It was a bold game, for I might have seen fit to confess my own shame and his, but I did not."

"He consented to give me means of getting out of the country, and did so. I went to Nova Scotia. For weeks I did not read a newspaper. Of course all my old acquaintances in New York knew I was a thief, but I would not read of it."

"My course in this matter was responsible for the fact that I did not hear of the drowned man until very recently. Then I chanced to see a New York paper, decided to look it over, and learned that I was supposed to be drowned. I need only say that the drowned man was some one else; I know nothing about him."

"I came back to this city, doing all I could to disguise myself, for I did not want to be arrested. I could not add to my shame, and all here must despise me, but I wanted to see how those I had known were doing, and yet avoid arrest."

"That is all!"

Dave Doyle ceased speaking, and Helen, who never had ceased to regard him attentively, quietly replied:

"On one point you are in error. No one knows that you ended your commercial career so irregularly, here. You refused to let me furnish the money to make good what you had so rashly taken, but, nevertheless, I did it. Unknown to you, I settled all that, and even when I believed you drowned, I never regretted it—your reputation was saved!"

Allen Hamlin—Dave Doyle no longer—looked amazed.

"You did all that—for a worthless wretch like me?"

"I did as I have said."

"Helen, I did not deserve this. I—"

What he said next Billy Blue Blazes did not hear, for he left the room abruptly. Later, he explained the reason to Dave:

"Yes, I took a quiet sneak. Didn't seem ter be needed in the dialogue nohow, an' when a feller feels that he's a fifth wheel ter the coach, et's time ter git a wiggle on. Harlem fleas, yes! But I guess the detective case has about run its race. Don't see ez I need ter do much more, an' so I'll devote my dodgin' around the docks ter other measly scamps. Jes' so, David!"

The case had run its race. The public had not yet suspected Simon Beebe of firing his own schooner, and after a conference he agreed to confess on the Zelland will case if the schooner episode was dropped. Dave Doyle's theory of a substituted—hence, a forged will—was correct. So, only one will was in court, and that was the one in Helen's favor.

Beebe and Harker were sent to State's Prison. Dan Monks, penitent, or frightened, or both, was forgiven. Ducky Meegan avoided arrest by abruptly going away from Gotham, and is now in Chicago.

Helen secured the Zelland property, but, with her usual generosity, helped Mrs. Rawlins and Leslie liberally.

Old King Coal and his wife still flourish, as does Wash Calhoun. The latter is in Helen's service as cook.

Will Archer easily secured position with another detective, and Billy Blue Blazes is still seen along the docks. His real character is known to but few there, but he is a favorite with all, especially the 'longshoremen, and as ready as ever to receive and give a joke.

His own happiest joke, in the opinion of the men of the docks, was this:

"Yes, sirree, I'm goin' ter attend a weddin' in high life. Harlem fleas, yes! I'll be there, William B. Blazes, Esquire, with all his finery of raiment, his freckles an' his squint eye. I'm a favorite with the Four Hundred, I be. It'll be an awful swell affair; Helen Eastman will be made Mrs. Allen Hamlin; and Billy Blue Blazes will be an honored guest!"

"You go ter a weddin' in high life?" scoffed a 'longshoreman, good-naturedly. "Gammon!"

But Billy went to the ceremony, nevertheless.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers.
98 William Street, New York.